

# Wild

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

**The Kimberley's  
Piccaninny Gorge**

**The Jatbula Trail**

**Kangaroo Valley:  
a hidden gem**

**Last legs of an  
alpine odyssey:  
the Australian Alps  
Walking Track**

**The edge of darkness:  
an epic paddle  
around Southern  
Africa**

**Walking boot  
survey**

**Jacket survey**

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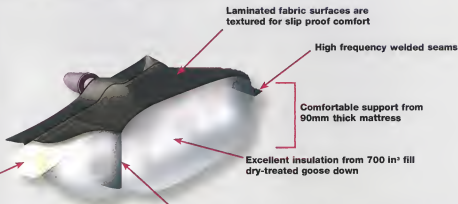
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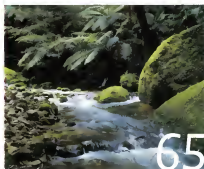
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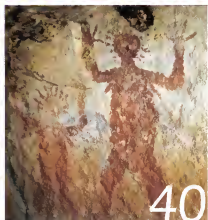
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### WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard to safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



Cover Catherine Lawson in the beautiful Piccaninny Gorge, the Kimberley, Western Australia (see article on page 24). David Bristow



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# HOME IS WHERE the heart is

Reflecting on wild places

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The Associate Editor at Mosquito Creek in the Grampians; probably contemplating the great beauty and eloquence of his next editorial, either that or whether he should have pancakes for breakfast.

Taylor collection

**A SENSE OF PLACE IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT pillars of our psyche, providing the base from which we grow and develop. My own sense of place is profoundly linked with the area I grew up in, the Grampians. While Melbourne is where I live, the Grampians will always be home.**

Right now it is one of my favourite times of the year—the depths of winter—and I have spent the last three weekends in its green and brown embrace. It's been cold and sometimes wet, but also glorious. Last Sunday as we drove home at sunset the paddocks were so green they almost seemed fluorescent, the leaves of giant red gums gleamed, and the edges of enormous stacks of cumulus clouds were lit in a way that words fail to describe. Winter in the Grampians is quiet. Not only are there fewer people about, but the air seems somehow denser, more absorbent of sound. We spent our time down south in the Victoria Range, where the fungi with all their subtle underfoot beauty were out in full force. One day we saw five wedge-tailed eagles soaring as a group above the ridgeline where we were walking.

When things go wrong here it makes me angry. I don't like it when great strips of land are bulldozed to protect private property from fires, and I don't like the many fire tracks that criss-cross the landscape and break up the wilderness—the legacy of a different era. I hate the rubbish people sometimes leave behind. It makes me

angry because I feel some ownership over this place. But, more than that, it makes me angry because I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Grampians, this beautiful strip of mountains on a shimmering Wimmera plain, home of so many happy memories from the weekends and years spent amongst its rocky places. This is where I feel most comfortable on the planet. Amidst this tangle of blue sky and jagged ridgelines.

I am sure I am not alone in this feeling. Places everywhere call certain people back to them and time again, people who know the contours and ways of the bush with a familiarity that is only built up by a deep passion and the passing of many years. A particular patch of wilderness or bush will hold a deep fascination that only grows, burying its roots deeper in the heart. Sometimes it seems to me that it is hard to know whether we adopt the land or are adopted by it.

I think there is a great unselfish beauty in this sense of belonging—even a warrior sense. Twenty-five years ago the Franklin River roused this sense into action and one of the great wilderness battles was won. The confrontations, both great and small, over wilderness have all been fought with a passion that has nothing to do with ownership and everything to do with an alternative way of viewing the world and its wild places; something which I think is more akin to belonging, and a recognition that what is here for us today should also be here tomorrow.

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Photo: John Leptard



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This passion for the wilderness is still clearly alive. It arrives in a hundred different ways on my desktop every day: in articles, pictures, news items, petitions, in press releases and Letters to the Editor. It is self-evident and almost overwhelming.

When I consider the idea of belonging, I think I can begin to guess at that sense of connection and belonging to the land that indigenous Australians feel. I imagine that the more entwined your life is with the land, the deeper this sense becomes.

In the Grampians, the presence of the original inhabitants never seems far away, although the signs of their passage are as subtle as ours are written large. When I was 11 or 12, my Uncle Fred—an amateur archaeologist—took me walking in a valley behind an area called Brim Springs in the Difficult Range. There, at the base of a massive boulder with a wind-scooped cave, we found balls of crushed ochre (mixed with possum fat, my Uncle said), left, it seemed, by an Aboriginal inhabitant of the area an unknown number of years ago. At that moment the past seemed very close, the distance between their hand and mine very small.

Having inherited this knowledge from my uncle, I see the signs of a previous existence wherever my travels through the Grampians take me: broken patches of glassy rock where tools were quarried, scar trees or, more occasionally, rock art (though too often from behind a fence).

Wild places change us if we choose to embrace them; it is hard to delineate how, but for me it is an opening to a different relationship with the land. I like the idea of belonging to the land rather than owning it. It seems like a more sustainable philosophy than our current path of endless acquisition and growth. Where will all that growth end when we only have one planet?

Years later, I found that great boulder and its wind-scooped cave again, but time and the elements had taken their course. The ochre balls were no longer there. If we learn anything in this life, it is that nothing is static. Eventually, all traces of human existence—the pathways, the roads, the houses, the cities—will all be erased and brought back into the fold of wilderness. In that sense nothing really matters—and yet, wild places do matter, almost more than anything, because they provide us with an essential reminder of where we come from and who we are. They remind us that being human is being part of the environment and that this is an intimate relationship, where everything is interlinked and nothing stands alone. ●

Ross Taylor  
[editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

### **New departments for Wild**

We have introduced a new natural history department called All Things Great and Small. We want readers to send us pictures of cool stuff they see in the bush—plants or animals—and we will get someone to write us a little natural history on the subject of your photo. Our first photo is a stunner, but don't let that put you off. We will accept less professional images. We have also added a new section for lightweight bushwalking recipes called From the Billy. Readers are also invited to send in their favourite camping recipes.

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# Bagging the peak baggers

The questioning of motivation, style and secret places continues

I WOULD LIKE TO RESPOND TO THE LETTER IN Wild no 109 from Philip Dawson, whose party of 14 'bagged' one of Tasmania's remotest peaks last year. Referring to my account of a trip to the same peak the previous year (Wild no 107), he implies that I concealed its identity so I could 'brag' about getting there while denying the opportunity to others.

It may be news to some peak baggers that not everyone goes bush for egotistical reasons. For me the journey was a pilgrimage to a place that I have long respected and revered. To have gone there as an ego trip would have seemed a desecration.

In limiting the detail in which I publicise trackless areas, I am following a policy promoted by the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service and endorsed (via the Bushwalking and Track Review process) by the State's major bushwalking clubs. The same is true of my policy of not visiting such areas in large groups. Disregarding these policies and promoting an acquisitive attitude to wilderness (as peak bagging does) increases the risk that trampling impacts and pad development will degrade some of Australia's wildland country.

Having taken the easy option himself, Dawson wonders if I enjoyed my trip. Apparently my use of words like 'stupendous', 'breath-taking', 'awesome' and 'exalted' didn't get the point across. My trip was demanding, but in wilderness hardship can be the price of admission to some of life's richest experiences. I wouldn't have missed it for the world, and I thank my lucky stars I didn't meet a party of 14 on the summit.

Martin Hawes  
Abels Bay, Tasmania

With regard to Philip Dawson's comments in Wild no 109. You can justify all you like as to your motives and intentions in taking a party of 14 anywhere. It gets back to your own philosophy of why you walk. To some of us, and I may be so presumptuous as to include Grant Dixon in this group, walking is a sacred experience, a chance to connect with something larger than oneself. To seek out isolated places of beauty en masse is profane. Not only is it disrespectful to the sacredness of secret places, but the impact on wild places of such a large group is environmentally irresponsible. There do need to be secret places because most others are subject to the onslaught of peak-bagging, name-dropping boasters. Don't get me wrong, take your groups of 14, 20 or whatever ungodly number, but...take them to places that are able to cope with such numbers. At least show some respect for those of us to whom the bush is a church and not an opportunity to promote oneself around the office.

Stephen de Lai  
Hobart, Tasmania



**"I don't go peak bagging so I can brag about it round the office...I brought the whole office with me."**

## Track notes off-track?

I feel it is important to inform you of my experience in regard to an article you published in Wild no 103. The article, entitled 'Wilsons Promontory's lesser known neighbour: an easy two-day walk in Victoria's Cape Liptrap Coastal Park', by Eli Greig, gives a description of various aspects of the two-day walk. Whilst his description of the natural sights that can be expected is excellent, I feel strongly that he dangerously underestimates the degree of difficulty of the walk.

I undertook the walk with three friends over the Easter break. While I admit I am not an experienced walker, my friends are all competent walkers and rockclimbers. The first day of the walk was a struggle for us all...the climb up on to the headlands was made difficult both by the poor grip on the largely sandy surfaces as well as the overgrowth of vegetation.

The last section of the second day of the walk, which Greig describes, at most, as 'precarious', is extremely dangerous and my friends and I can only thank luck that we are here to tell the tale. The sandy beaches which begin the second day of walking give way to pebbly beaches and then boulders which are difficult and time-con-

suming to traverse. At no time during this section of the walk were we able to find a way to ascend to the lighthouse, although our GPS told us we were a mere 800 metres from it, as the crow flies. At the tip of the cape, which is already elevated and subject to strong waves, we found ourselves unable to pass any further. There was a sandy, steep slope with small tufts of grass which offered our only hope of ascent. Had we turned back to Bear Gully or even the various residential properties on the way back to Bear Gully, we would not have arrived before nightfall (and we had set off that morning not much past 8 am). Therefore we ascended this dangerous slope with the knowledge that, should we fall, our fall would be broken by sharp rocks and boulders and then the rough waves below. Having ascended this area, we were faced with an ascent of approximately 100 metres to the crest of the hill. We were unable to see more than a metre or so in front of us owing to the density of the vegetation. There was not even a remnant of a track and we ascended for approximately an hour having to push aside the incredibly dense vegetation that obstructed our way. At the crest of the hill we did find a path which unfortunately did not lead anywhere and forked

**aspiration** *n* aim, ambition, desire, dream, goal, hope, objective, wish



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off into small animal tracks, despite there being evidence of ribbon (which we found on the first day of walking, suggesting we were on the correct path). We abandoned this path eventually, as it did not lead to the lighthouse of Cape Liptrap. Instead, we headed towards the sound of the nearby traffic, having to traverse private farmland to access the road.

I am aware that factors such as weather conditions and frequency of use of paths can change the degree of difficulty of a walk, but I feel it is necessary to let you know, so that you can inform readers, that Greig's article does not reflect the current situation at Cape Liptrap.

Natalie Stowe  
Victoria

Eli Greig writes: 'I may have underestimated the degree of difficulty but, having done the entire walk three times and the eastern section at least five times with inexperienced walkers, my impression was that it is relatively easy.' Greig agrees that it is possible the track may have become overgrown, in which case it would be easy to miss (as Natalie Stowe describes), and that, if you did miss the last track to the lighthouse, ascending would indeed be precarious. We would appreciate hearing from any readers who may have done this walk recently regarding the state of the track. Associate Editor

### A question of tracks

I just got back from an exhilarating mid-winter walk in the southern Blue Mountains, a magnificent wilderness that bushwalkers have cared for, saved and loved for nearly 100 years. The wind roared over razor-back ridges, snow fell into the blue depths and lyrebirds chimed from the gullies.

But we were dismayed to see that someone has cut a track along one of the classic routes off the Gangerang Range. Generations of walkers have somehow managed to cope with this short stretch of mallee and heath without hacking a track to make it easier.

This is in the heart of the wilderness, a good day's walk from the closest road, two days and more from other directions. What were they thinking? I'm sure these people don't see themselves as selfish vandals. They left no rubbish and carved a very neat passage. Did they think they were doing the rest of us a favour? Were they possessed with some kind of civic-minded zeal? Do they reckon they own the place?

The metre and a half wide swathe through living vegetation was depressing enough. Then there's the disruption to the natural runways of all the wombats and swamp wallabies that actually belong there. The diversion of runoff and the erosion that will surely follow. The fact that such 'work' is not only illegal in a national park but violates every principle of wilderness protection and travel. Whatever happened to 'take only photos, leave only footprints'?

It's immoral. If you can't leave the bush alone, then please don't go there.

Ian Brown  
Mount Victoria, NSW

I had a memorable two-day walk in Croajingolong State Park from Point Hicks to Mallacoota over the Labour Day weekend this year with the Ben Cruachan Walking Club.

The scenery was fantastic, with beautiful, unspoiled beaches. The rocky outcrops had to be

negotiated carefully or avoided by going inland through scrub and forest. That was the problem—these tracks are poorly signposted and very overgrown. Some may disappear within a year or two. The Croajingolong State Park is extensively publicised and the various camping areas within it are clean and well maintained, but the tracks are not!

What is the point of publicising this walk if the tracks are so poorly marked and overgrown?

Come on, Parks!

Doug Johnson  
Mooroocud, Victoria

I read with interest the article 'In and out of the Kowmung' (Wild no 109) as I have enjoyed many trips through this area over the years. My last trip was at Easter 2006, when our party walked from Batsh Camp to Yerranderie via Mt Colong and Tonalli Gap. On previous trips, my preferred route had been by Bent-Hook swamp, Mt Meier, Colong Station and Colong Gap, then on to Yerranderie. In fact, I spent many nights (probably illegally) in the abandoned Colong Station homestead when it was in a habitable condition. During the planning for the Easter 2006 walk, I decided to call the National Parks and Wildlife Service ranger in Oberon to check about access through the Colong Station property. He told me that the property owner was not permitting walkers through his property, and even very polite requests for access were turned down. Apparently, a 'shooting iron' was produced on one occasion to dissuade 'trespassing' walkers. It behoves all walkers to get permission prior to entering private property. In this area, things are made more difficult due to the patchwork nature of the National Park reserve and private property. It's not easy trying to decide what is what by looking at the topographic map. Walkers might like to think that property owners won't mind if we just 'duck across here' to save some time or distance, but it seems some owners don't agree with that philosophy.

Steve Deards  
Cronulla, NSW

I recently returned from a 17-day trip walking the Larapinta Trail through the West Macdonnell Ranges west of Alice Springs (a fantastic walk, highly recommended). Planning our food was a pretty major undertaking, but carrying it was made easier by the fact that we were able to have three food drops en route.

I would have found 17 days of packet pasta and couscous pretty hard going, but the trip was made far easier because we had some really enjoyable meals, home-cooked by ourselves! How? We dehydrated our own pre-cooked meals. So I'm writing to suggest to any readers who are contemplating a long trip that they buy, beg or borrow a dehydrator and get busy in the kitchen well ahead of time. It is time-consuming, but worth every minute spent. We probably averaged one of our own meals every two or three days, and did we look forward to those!

So what did we prepare and dehydrate ahead? We had chili beans (use small beans, as the larger ones take too long to rehydrate), savoury mince with lots of vegies, sweet curry mince and rice, a very thick corn soup to which we added dried peas, and sweet potato risotto.

We also dried our own vegies, which we added to the pasta and couscous meals. A variety of fruit—plums, kiwi fruit, pineapple (absolutely delicious), bananas—also went into the dehydrator and, of course, we bought dried apples and apricots. We started out eating the fruit as our snacks, but one night we stewed the leftovers and put them into our instant custard. It was so good that we continued to do that with the rest of the fruit. Stewed fruit and sweet custard is so comforting on a cold, windy night!

Preparation on the trip was easy: as soon as our tent was up the meal packet came out. We put water over the food and kept adding more water as it was absorbed until the consistency was right, and then it was just a matter of heating and eating. It all tasted so good! Get cooking and drying!

Jan Hollingworth  
Floreat, WA

Great story headed 'From the Cradle', by Eric Phillips (Wild no 109). As I read along, I was thinking to myself that it was interesting and fairly accurate—that was, until I got to where they were between Windermere and Pelion Hut. They had left the Fourth Lookout and it appears they were on the Pine Forest Moor, and Eric claims that in the distance they could see Pelion Plain and the Pelion Hut. That is not so: the only time you get to see the Pelion Hut is when you are almost on top of it. I wouldn't normally worry about the description of the journey not being accurate, but in the past I have seen people carry copies of Wild and use them as a reference.

Bob Thompson  
Ocean Grove, Victoria

Eric Phillips tells us that Bob Thompson is correct: New Pelion Hut is not visible. However, Old Pelion Hut is. Old Pelion is the hut Phillips was referring to, although this is not specified in the article. Associate Editor

I agree with Chloe Simons (Wild no 109). Babies in backpacks are fun. I have a passion for bushwalking and a history of doing multiday hikes in remote areas. When my wife Heather and I had a baby boy (named Harry), I decided to try bushwalking with him. Harry was bursting out of his front carrier by eight months, so it was time for a backpack. I have noticed his persona changes when he is in his backpack. He chatters a lot more than when he is in a pram. There are not many people who use backpacks where we live and there is quite a lot of novelty in seeing a little one on a bushwalk. People often stop for a chat and a smile and I feel it is great for his social development. We don't go on rough tracks because there is a risk of me tripping over. We usually walk for about one hour at a time—with Harry weighing about 16 kilograms, this is a good work-out. I've thoroughly enjoyed the experience of 'backpacking' with my little boy and I am glad I took the opportunity to do so.

Bernard Blanchfield  
Killara, NSW

Readers' letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address for verification). A selection will be published in this column. Letters of less than 200 words are more likely to be printed. Write to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email editorial@wild.com.au

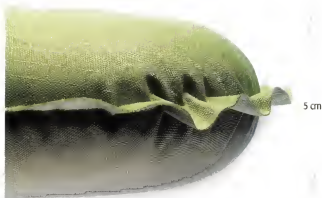
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# Death of a Trek: the Annapurna Circuit

## Glenn Tempest reports on the encroachment of roads on one of the world's great treks

Anyone contemplating Nepal's Annapurna Circuit had better make it quick because in a few years' time there may be little left of what was once described as the 'best trek in the world'. Back in 1977, most trekkers started and finished their Himalayan adventure in the frontier town of Pokhara (the road reached Pokhara in 1968) or in the nearby hill town of Gorkha. Over the next ten years roads gradually pushed all the way to Beshi Shahar in the east and Ghorepani in the west, which effectively shortened the trek by about a week and (for most trekkers) effectively ended its circuitous nature. The trek now officially starts in Beshi Shahar, but trekkers can save a day by bussing to the village of Bhulbhole, where the trek crosses to the opposite side of the Marsyangdi River. Unfortunately, a new road has been blasted along the western side of the river, allowing enterprising trekkers to avoid yet another day's walk by taking four-wheel drives all the way to Syanje. From there, Nepali road crews are currently hard at work blasting entire hillsides into the river as they slowly make their way up the narrowing valley. This pre-monsoon season saw trekkers confronted with long sections of dangerously unstable trails and having to run a gauntlet of falling stones and boulders.

On the other side of Thorung La (at 5416 metres this is the highest point of the trek) things are just as bad. Various sections of road have already been constructed along the Kali Gandaki Valley all the way to the town of Jomsom. Upstream from Jomsom things are not much



Trekkers running the gauntlet on the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal. With road work going on above the track, walking has become an exciting proposition. *Glenn Tempest*

better. Narrow sections of rough road continue as far as Muktinath, barely a stone's throw from Thorung La itself. Four-wheel drives, motor-bikes and tractors are now a fairly common sight along what was once one of the wildest parts of the walk. So where does this leave the crown jewel of Nepal's great treks? Some guiding

companies already provide scenic variations between villages that manage to avoid long stretches of road walking. No doubt the vast majority of the trek will eventually have to be rerouted in this way. If you are intent on following the traditional route, give it a few years and you'll probably be able to drive it.

## Dick Smith puts his money where his mouth is

### Grant Dixon reports on new funding for the track into Frenchmans Cap

Among the generations of bushwalkers who have tramped to Frenchmans Cap is wealthy businessman Dick Smith. The three- to four-day walk to this most spectacular and prominent peak in western Tasmania traverses rainforest and button-grass plains, including the legendary 'Sodden Loddons'.

Smith first visited Frenchmans Cap 40 years ago and returned again last summer. He con-

sidered that the track was in poor condition and had deteriorated significantly since his early visits. After all, many changes take place in 40 years. However, rather than merely bemoan the problems, Smith offered \$1 million over ten years to fix them. The Tasmanian Government, which has been criticised for its lack of investment in track works in western Tasmania in recent years, has agreed to contribute a further \$500 000.

The Parks & Wildlife Service has actually undertaken quite extensive works since the

early 1990s, using innovative techniques in places and effectively stabilising virtually the entire track in the rugged terrain beyond Lake Vera. However, extensive sections of less environmental significance (notably the Loddon Plains) have had minimal works.

The challenge now will be to invest the newly available funds to ensure the sustainable future of the Frenchmans Cap track and facilities without dramatically altering the character that Dick Smith and thousands of others have come to the area to experience.

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# The Taj Mahal of Tassie?

Chris Bell from the Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) reports on recent developments in one of Tasmania's pre-eminent national parks

Tasmania is again being confronted with inappropriate infrastructure inside its national parks. The most recent example of this 'industrial tourism' is the Windy Ridge precinct within the Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park. The Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS) has replaced the original hut with another lavish, over-designed, too-large Pelion-style lodge, complete with oversized ranger's building, tent platforms and more. When finished (the dotted line in the photo shows the final size), the new hut will be four times the size of the original, yet with an increase of only eight beds—at an astonishing cost of over \$1 million. (The cost includes \$200 000 for helicopter time and the unnecessary ranger's hut. Why a separate ranger's lockable room was not provided for in the main building—as at Pine Valley Hut—remains a mystery.) By way of comparison, an addition to the Windermere Hut several years ago increased the size of that hut by eight beds for a modest outlay of less than \$60 000. The clearing of the Windy Ridge site for the oversized hut and more tent platforms has resulted in considerable clearance of vegetation; as a result the lodge, toilets and tent platforms are now highly visible from the Acropolis and Mt Geryon.

At a time when we should be taking global warming seriously and reducing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, the PWS seems oblivious of its forthcoming obligations, instead increasing our reliance on fuel-guzzling helicopters. The PWS should be minimising its reliance on helicopters (particularly when there are other areas that are in dire need of maintenance—the Western Arthurs, for example) and start playing a leading role in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The recent review of the World Heritage Area (WHA) also stressed that the PWS 'should be proactively reducing noise levels so that visitors to the WHA experience peace and quiet'—a recommendation ignored!

If this fiasco is a sign of things to come, one can only imagine the noise levels, degree of disturbance, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the like that will



The new hut at Windy Ridge on the Overland Track. The dotted line shows the size the hut will be when it is completed. Photo supplied by the TNPA

be experienced with the proposed environmentally unfriendly Three Capes Walk and its helicopter-dependent construction and servicing.

A final concern is that, given rising fuel costs, the projected cost of the Three Capes Walk will blow out and Tasmanians will be left with one of the most severely infrastructure-impacted natural landscapes in Australia.

## Wild Diary

Wild Diary listings provide information about rucksack-sports events and instruction courses run by non-commercial organisations. Send items for publication to the Editor, Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181. Email: [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

### September

**Kathmandu Max 12 hr M**  
20 September, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**Night Rogaine 6/8 hr R**  
21 September, ACT  
<http://act.rogaine.asn.au>

### October

**Perisher Cup S**  
4–5 October, NSW  
[www.hoppet.com.au](http://www.hoppet.com.au)

**Lake Macquarie 12 hr R**  
11 October, NSW  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Metrogaine 6 hr R**  
11 October, QLD  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**State Championship 24 hr R**  
11–12 October, VIC  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

**Fréycinet Lodge Challenge M**  
11–12 October, TAS  
[www.tasultra.org](http://www.tasultra.org)

### 3/6 hr R

12 October, QLD  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### State Slalom Championships C

18 October, NSW  
[www.canoe.org.au](http://www.canoe.org.au)

### State Selection Race C

18–19 October, NSW  
[www.canoe.org.au](http://www.canoe.org.au)

### 8/12 hr R

25 October, SA  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### Multisport M

26 October, QLD  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### November

**6/12 hr R**  
8 November, ACT  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### Southern Zone Championships and State Selection Race C

8 November, NSW  
[www.canoe.org.au](http://www.canoe.org.au)

### Great North Walk 100s BR

8–9 November, NSW  
[www.terrigaltrotters.com.au](http://www.terrigaltrotters.com.au)

### 4/7 hr R

9 November, QLD  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### Socialgaine 6 hr R

16 November, NSW  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### Kathmandu Adventure Series M

16 November, VIC  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

### Mark Webber Challenge M

19–23 November, TAS  
[www.markwebberchallenge.com](http://www.markwebberchallenge.com)

### Victorian Canoe Slalom Championships C

29–30 November, VIC  
[www.canoe.org.au](http://www.canoe.org.au)

### State Championship 24 hr R

29–30 November, TAS  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### December

### Adventure Paddle C

6 December, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

### Murray Marathon C

26–31 December, VIC  
[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

### January

**Adventure Paddle C**  
31 January, NSW  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

### February

**Cradle Mountain BR**  
2 February, TAS  
[www.coolrunning.com.au](http://www.coolrunning.com.au)

**Kathmandu Adventure M**  
7 February, VIC  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

### Australian Masters Games 6 hr R

28 February, VIC  
[www.rogaine.asn.au](http://www.rogaine.asn.au)

### March

**Kathmandu Adventure M**  
28 March, QLD  
[www.maxadventure.com.au](http://www.maxadventure.com.au)

**Activities:** B bushwalking, BR bush running, C canoeing, M multisports, R rogaine, S skiing. Rogaine events are organised by the State rogaine associations. Canoeing events are organised by the State canoeing associations unless otherwise stated.

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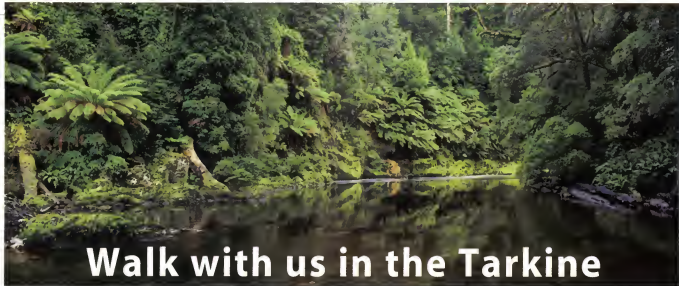
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# Henry Gold: an eye for wilderness and the future



**Left**, Henry Gold at work in the Snowy-Indi National Park in 1985. *Craig Benjamin* **Right**, more recently in 2005, in the West MacDonnell Ranges. *James Swinton*

## Anne McLeod profiles the valuable contribution of this wilderness photographer and environmentalist

Henry Gold's contribution to the life-and-death struggle to protect wilderness in New South Wales's southern Blue Mountains was to camp out on the freezing 1200 metre high Boyd Plateau and photograph threatened areas. In one of the state's most scenic areas, timber companies and the Forestry Commission had been cutting into native forests for years, leaving devastation behind them. They planned to create huge pine plantations. At the same time, conservationists were fighting to have the entire Blue Mountains wilderness declared a national park but were a fragmented collection of individuals and bushwalking clubs. The threat to destroy the Kanangra-Boyd wilderness brought them together into one coherent lobby group and saw the birth of the modern conservation movement.

On his expedition in August 1974, Gold drove his old Holden station wagon to the start of the track to the Boyd Range and set off through the snow-covered eucalypts but, unprepared for the sub-zero weather he encountered, he retreated to the mattress in the back of his car. The following night he camped en route in a sheltered saddle protected from the strong southerlies and made it to the Kowmung River at 8 am, but the water was high and flowing fast. He wrote in his diary at the time:

*Impossible to cross at Lannigans Creek junction. Checked upstream where river splits into two channels and successfully crossed first channel (water icy), but second one very deep and rapid. There was a fallen tree across, but it was covered with a thick and slippery layer of frost. Too dangerous to cross, especially on my own. Impossible to follow the river at this high level of water. Can't afford to get my camera equipment wet, let alone lose it, at this early stage. Decided to return the way I came.*

Night again below freezing, but overcast since early morning. Icy southerly winds obviously on front moving through. Walked to Mount Misery and Whungee Whungee area. Sunny breaks from midday through to sunset enabled me to get the photos I wanted.

The Boyd Plateau was saved from becoming a pine forest a few days after a book illustrated with Gold's emotionally resonant photographs was presented to the Minister for Lands. In 1979 Neville Wran, then Premier of NSW, walked into Parliament with a book of Gold's photographs under his arm during the successful battle to save the Colo Wilderness region, the state's largest, in the northern Blue Mountains.

Gold's latest book, *Blue Mountains World Heritage*, vividly illustrates the entire history of the epochal campaign that began in 1932 with a proposal by Myles Dunphy for a Greater Blue Mountains National Park. In 2000 this impressive collection became an effective tool for lobbying delegates deciding whether to declare World Heritage status for the entire Blue Mountains wilderness. Until the 21 delegates viewed these photographs, only eight of them were convinced of the area's special qualities. Afterwards, the proposal passed unopposed.

Henry Gold's love for the Australian landscape was formed in an unlikely place. As a teenager living in the cramped one-bedroom apartment he shared with his family in postwar Vienna, he saw a woodcut of the Blue Mountains with their clifflines and mysterious valleys. It had a profound effect on him. A few years later Gold could stand the harsh austerities no longer. He decided to get as far away from Europe as he could. Australia was the most distant country and was desperate for migrants who qualified under the White Australia policy. Immediately on arrival in 1956, he headed to the view that had captured his imagination. Relishing the freedom to camp and roam without restriction in the wild bushland, he explored alone, capturing on film much of the landscape he loved. Joining the Sydney

Bushwalker's Club, known for its commitment to conservation, he found others who shared his feelings.

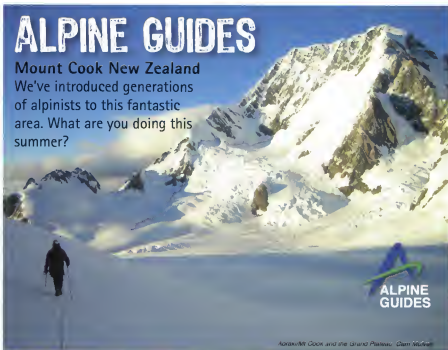
In the early 1960s, a visit to the United States gave him the opportunity to show his images to the Americans, who were then completely ignorant of Australia and its natural features. Those who saw them were so excited that Gold was invited to present a screening to the international convention of the American Photographic Society in San Francisco. Through this he met Ansell Adams, the renowned nature photographer.

Gold was keen to study Adams's methods. This gave him his start in black-and-white photography. After he returned to Australia, Gold decided he could play a part in the environmental movement through his images. He wanted to open Australians' eyes to their unique natural heritage and used the black-and-white techniques he had learnt to create dramatic photographs. But his love for black-and-white was never profitable enough to provide for his growing family. Gold refined his skills in colour photography and established his own studio, producing the stunning NSW wilderness calendars and diaries. His Sydney heritage calendars of old houses in the inner suburbs were also popular and were sold mainly through the National Trust.

As Honorary Photographer for the Colong Foundation for Wilderness (the oldest wilderness society in Australia), Gold's photographs have been used in every environmental campaign in NSW since the 1960s and have played a major role in overcoming ignorance and apathy. They take us on a visual journey through the beauty and grandeur of the state—its rivers, gorges and rainforests. In 2006, Gold was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for 'Services to wilderness preservation through the use of photographic documentation'. Nearly six million hectares, over seven per cent of New South Wales' total land area, is now part of the national parks system.

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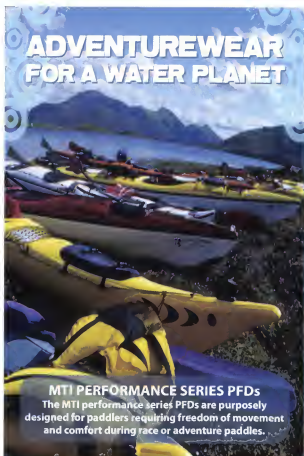
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## Australian Mountain Running Championships



World M55 veteran champion, Trevor Jacobs, running the veteran's race on the second day; he managed fourth in the open despite looking a tad overweight. John Harding

**John Harding reports on those who would rather run than walk**

The 2008 Australian Mountain Running Championships were held over two days on the second weekend in May, with the junior and open races held on Mt Tennent, south of Tharwa in the ACT, and the veterans race on Mt Rob Roy on the other side of the Tuggeranong Valley.

Canberra's Scott McTaggart was seeking his fourth straight Australian mountain running title and he did not disappoint, setting off at a furious pace on the 11 kilometre open men's course, which featured 1000 metres of climbing. He clocked 52 minutes, 30 seconds for a commanding victory. Orienteering international Troy de Haas from Victoria gained second place in 56 minutes, 38 seconds, with Stephen Brown of Wollongong third in 58 minutes, 12 seconds. World M55 veteran champion, Trevor Jacobs of Canberra, finished fourth in 62 minutes, 10 seconds.



Canberra's Jessamy Hosking completed the eight kilometre women's course in 46 minutes, 24 seconds, with fellow ACT runner Vanessa Haverd second in 47 minutes, 57 seconds and World Orienteering Championship representative Kathryn Ewels of Victoria third in 48 minutes, 59 seconds.

The veterans championship the next day started from the historic 1850s Lanyon home-stead on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River. Sydney M40 runner Richard Roberts dominated the race from the start, completing the nine kilometre course in 40 minutes, 27 seconds. Berima M50 runner Paul Bruce was second in 44 minutes, 28 seconds. Third and fourth were Canberra's David Hosking (the second M40) in 45 minutes, 16 seconds, and Trevor Jacobs in 45 minutes, 51 seconds. Both were backing up from outstanding runs in the open championships on the previous day.

Canberra's Peter Brown won the M45 championship in 48 minutes, 3 seconds; Wayne Bartley from Lake Macquarie the M60 in 56 minutes, 51 seconds; Bob Chapman from Canberra the M70 in 1 hour, 5 minutes, 33 seconds; Max Scherleitner from Albury the M75 in 1 hour, 46 minutes, 8 seconds; and Canberra's Rad Leovic the M80 in 1 hour, 21 minutes, 46 seconds. Leovic regularly runs up both Mt Ainslie and Black Mountain in only 22 minutes and has won world veterans championship medals in both triathlon and duathlon.

The women's field up Mt Rob Roy was small because of Mother's Day commitments. Michelle Elmitt from Tuggeranong was first finisher and W45 champion in 1 hour, 3 minutes, 42 seconds; with W65 Caroline Campbell, of Yarralumla, second in 1 hour, 17 minutes, 12 seconds.

## Scroggin

### Wombeyan Cave Rescue

Stephen Bunton reports that a cave rescue at Wombeyan Caves received the attention of the national press after Geoff McDonnell became stuck in Bouvierie Cave. This cave is gated and locked because of the quality of the formations it contains. McDonnell entered the cave for the purpose of photography and became stuck when a 30 kilogram rock was dislodged and pinned him in a squeeze. There was concern for McDonnell's safety because he is an insulin-dependent diabetic.

McDonnell was on a Sydney University Speleological Society (SUSS) trip. He arrived early on the afternoon of Friday 16 May 2008 and entered the cave alone at about 3 pm. The other SUSS members notified authorities of his disappearance at 5 pm on Saturday and he was located at about 9 am on Sunday, 42 hours after entering the cave. He was semiconscious and hypothermic, and about 80 metres underground. He was eventually rescued from the cave at around 8 pm on Sunday, after a further 11 hours. McDonnell, who has since stepped down from his offices with SUSS and the Sydney Speleological Society, has been charged with entering a cave without authority, risking the safety of a person illegally and entering a closed part of the park.

### 13 out of 14 for Lock

Andrew Lock is getting desperately close to fulfilling his quest to climb all 14 8000 metre peaks, after reaching the summit of Makalu, the world's fifth highest peak, on 21 May this year. Makalu is his 13th 8000 metre peak; only the summit of Shisha Pangma now eludes him. The expedition was dogged by bad weather, ill

of Australia's unique assemblage of sclerophyll (hard leaved) vegetation. The second is to ensure the protection of Antarctica through a World Heritage listing, while the third relates to his advocacy of a steady state economy alternative for society. Geoff is the Australian Director of the Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy. To find out more



Andrew Lock on his way up to Camp Four on his successful ascent of Makalu. Andrew Lock collection

health and a helicopter crash, but despite these obstacles Lock climbed to the top. In his blog he wrote that it 'was a great feeling to hug the tiny summit and look down upon the world. Everest stood tall and proud a few kilometres away and hundreds of peaks of the Himalayan chain stretched east and west of me'. To find out more, or to read the blog, visit [www.andrew-lock.com](http://www.andrew-lock.com)

### Pedirka Desert solo crossing

Lying close to Australia's arid heart, the Pedirka Desert is one of Australia's smaller deserts, some 1250 square kilometres in area, located in northern South Australia. Along its longest axis it measures roughly 175 kilometres, a long, dry stretch of parallel sand ridges, up to ten metres high, dominated by dense mulga. The Pedirka Desert was crossed in 2000 by a team of four led by adventurer Tim Jarvis, but had never been conquered solo. Unreported from late 2006, Travis Stenborg made the first transversal solo, trekking from the Pedirka Siding ruins along the Old Ghan railway route and cutting cross-country through dunes and scrub.

### World Environment Day awards

The United Nations Association of Australia World Environment Day awards were announced on 6 June this year, and longtime Wild contributor Geoff Mosley scooped the pool, winning the Individual Award. The awards acknowledge action taken at a local level to address global environmental issues. Mosley has three big projects: the 'sea to snow' World Heritage Area project, which relates to a part

about the first project, you can read his story of walking the Australian Alps Walking Track in this issue.

### Red Cross Murray Marathon

The Red Cross has announced that this will be the last year that it is involved with the Murray Marathon, ending a 40-year association with the 400 kilometre race down Australia's largest river. Organisers of the event are determined to keep it going without the Red Cross, but in the meantime plan to make this year's Murray Marathon the biggest ever. To find out more or to volunteer your services, you can email Bill Robinson on [booyak@tpg.com.au](mailto:booyak@tpg.com.au)

### Corrections and amplifications

There were three errors in the last issue of Wild, no 109. On page 21, the Web address for the Bushwalkers Wilderness Rescue Squad should have read [www.bwrs.org.au](http://www.bwrs.org.au). On page 69, the distance of the Mt Aleck walk should have been listed at around 20 kilometres, not 45–50 kilometres. On page 80, we got the prices of the Lowe Alpine Fusion GTX and Peak jackets the wrong way around: they should have read \$600 and \$300, respectively.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)



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# To Boldly Go

Quentin Chester looks for a new path into the lost world of Australian exploration

ON 11 MARCH 1802 MATTHEW FLINDERS WAS up a creek, going nowhere. He had a couple of paddles but a serious lack of water. Even a minor stream would have been welcome. Instead, the mangrove channel he rowed into was 'scarcely more than a drain from swamps'. After three months charting Australia's unknown south coast he was high and dry at the head of the Spencer Gulf. His dream of discovering a mighty waterway or inland sea was all but over.

The sight of mountains to the east did little to lift Flinders's spirits. While he chased ducks and swans on the mangrove flats, a scientific party trekked to the highest of these distant peaks. Yet they too returned to HMS Investigator disappointed with what they found. Flinders duly named the summit Mt Brown after the leader of this shore party, botanist Robert Brown. Apart from jotting a few notes on his chart and naming another peak Mt Arden (after his great-grandmother, no less), Flinders had not much more to say about the mountains.

Two hundred and six years later a party of four climbed to the crest of this range. For us, the expanse of red sand and saltbush plain was neither desolate or barren but oddly uplifting. Of the feelings we shared, disappointment was not on the list. We took comfort that the view north had changed little in a couple of centuries. Looking into the glare of the setting sun we spied mesa-like hills on the horizon. To anyone with restless leanings these are an excuse to consider the possibilities of space, the travels that could be made.

For Chris and me this meant raving about a long overland trek. Nothing too arduous, mind you. What we had in mind was a journey both amply provisioned and suitably aimless. Improbable, maybe, yet not totally far-fetched. After all, the vastness of the north was still intact. Not only that, but at home Chris had a couple of donkeys who could do the load bearing. Our spouses knew about such idle dreaming. All they said was: 'Yeah, right.'

Still, at least we were out walking. Our camp was atop the Dutchmans Stern, a crag-capped knoll named by settlers for the resemblance of its upswep profile to ye olde Dutch sailing vessels. Aside from such arcana, and its reputation as one of South Australia's best short bushwalks, this prow of quartzite is the pivot point for much bigger stories.

Geographically speaking, a lot of coastal weather rolls up to here but goes no further. That in turn means this is the northern limit for entire communities of plants and animals. In Aboriginal life the range is a significant convergence for the boundaries of four tribal groups: the Jadjiaura, Pangkala, Nukunu and Ngadjuri peoples. Long before Flinders and crew sailed up the gulf, almost every part of this country was well travelled. The locals could have told him a thing or two about duck hunting—and much more.



The view from the top of Dutchmans Stern, Flinders Ranges, South Australia. *Quentin Chester*

'The Dutchman' is also a handy vantage point from which to consider the pageant of latter-day explorers. A few kilometres from our camp lay Depot Creek. Here, 37 years after Flinders, Edward John Eyre set up a base to seek out grazing country to the north. However, in doggedly following the flat country west of the ranges, the best he could come up with were reports of glistening salt lakes and 'barren, miserable plains'.

It was after the first of Eyre's four expeditions that the ranges flanking his journeys were named in honour of Matthew Flinders. A fitting tribute? Well, by the time Flinders had circled Australia, he'd spent 15 of his 28 years at sea. He lived to discover shorelines, harbours and waterways. Yet the greatest memorial to this most maritime of men is not just the site of his 'mortifying' disappointment, it's also stubbornly terrestrial, a jarring landscape of scorched rock and spinifex.

Australian exploration is fertile territory indeed for spotters of irony. Even Eyre himself is immortalised by shimmering Lake Eyre, the world's largest salt lake and a none-too-subtle reminder of the befudding expanses that messed with his mind for years. That's the thing about stepping into the unknown; history's forensic hindsight has a way of making you look like a bit of a nut job.

Take the case of John Horrocks. He decided to try his hand at exploring. 'I want a more stirring life,' he wrote to his sister. In 1846 he led

his party north past Dutchmans Stern. A few days out from Eyre's Depot Camp, he was reloading a gun when his camel, called Harry, knocked him. Horrocks' gun discharged, blowing off two fingers and the left side of his jaw. The injuries turned septic and he died a few weeks later. And the line used by a recent scribe? 'The only explorer to be shot by his own camel.'

Even with better luck, explorers often struggled with the battering extremes of terrain and climate. After early success, Ludwig Leichhardt vanished without trace on his third expedition. Edmund Kennedy ended up just 20 kilometres shy of Cape York with a spear in his back. Haunted by visions of inland waters, Charles Sturt hauled his scurvy-ravaged body as far as the Simpson Desert. 'It looked like the entrance into Hell,' he wrote. Then of course we have Burke and Wills mouldering away on the banks of Cooper Creek.

With every passing decade, exploration stories are sliced and diced. What once lived as heroic tales of discovery and endurance have been rendered comatose as parables of misfortune, disillusion and bumbling. In the comfort of our armchairs we are lulled into dismissing a big slice of history: 'Oh dear, those musty old explorers, how quaint and misguided.' Or, worse still, they are reduced to being flag bearers of shame, hapless ushers of a sorry age of dispossession and environmental ruin.

Head bush, however, and the further inland you go, the more useless these verdicts appear.

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Even a couple of days on a landmark as accessible as Dutchmans Stern gets you thinking. While Chris was driving the stove, coaxing dinner to life, a full moon rose behind our backs. The light flooding across the western plains was sharp enough to let us make out the vegetation that stippled far-off hills and creek lines. Easterly breezes—the same seasonal winds that Flinders struggled to sail into—jostled around us.

Sleeping in the open, we were woken several times by wind gusts and the bright, spectral moonlight. Under the overhang of the night sky the immensity of the desert seemed more forceful than ever. Drowsy and dream-addled, I looked into the distance and imagined characters such as Eyre and Sturt fronting up day after day, month after month, to face this void. Whatever their motives or flaws, the crunching physical reality they faced, their capacity to submit body and spirit, felt humbling beyond belief.

Pushing deep into the desert, many explorers dumped a lot of equipment simply to survive. They also had to ditch ways of thinking. Scarcely able to read the terrain and powerless to control their fate, it was a case of working with what they found. As water and supplies ran out, the present became ever more urgent; the foreground blazed with details. And part of exercising the will to survive involved crossing a threshold beyond which self and place merged. Just keeping going meant constantly cranking up a relationship with a world that had become both their captor and their provider.

An identity bound tight to the land had been at the heart of Aboriginal life and belief for countless generations. It's no accident then that bodes such as Eyre and Sturt developed a strong regard for a people for whom journeying and exploration were so intrinsic. Many nineteenth-century expeditions travelled with Aboriginal guides and benefited from indigenous skill and knowledge. Cultural confusion and violent clashes were perhaps inevitable. More revealing are the accounts of surprise meetings and humanity shared. In a desert, place is the ultimate leveller.

It's also strangely addictive. Despite their ordeals—or perhaps because of them—the explorers kept going back for more. They had survived the desert, and a part of the place lived on in them. Near-death experiences did not stop Ernest Giles doing four expeditions in as many years, tackling across the remotest reaches of Western Australia. Like John McDouall Stuart, who made four epic treks to cross the continent, Giles found the elemental encounter with the bush irresistible. For McDouall Stuart this was just as well, because in Adelaide town he was no match for the demon drink.

Even though it's a well-worn track that traverses Dutchmans Stern, the walk still conjures surprises. The next morning we left the cliff-top battlements and descended into woodland. After a night on the exposed ridge, it was a welcome change to drift along these sheltering slopes. Keen to discover what the valley held in store, Dale wandered ahead. Chris, Heather and I were happy to dawdle along under the sugar gums and enjoy the morning warmth among fragrant cassinia and Christmas bushes.

All morning the stately sugar gums had been framing views of the conical peak that Robert Brown and his mates sweated up in 1802. Reach-

ing the top at dusk, he was too late to see the mighty ranges hugging the northern horizon. And as a scientist Brown would be kicking himself if he knew some of the botanical treasures they missed. Still, he did alright. During the voyage with Flinders he collected some 3400 plant specimens, laying the foundations of Australian botany.

By 1802 the entire continent was already dotted with campsites and criss-crossed by well-worn tracks. So is it a mistake to talk of blow-ins such as Brown and Flinders as discoverers? Perhaps, but only if you treat exploration as an exercise in being first. What really counts is the story of the journey; the places revealed and the characters in action. It's a big country. Reflecting on the scope of Aboriginal knowledge, the richness of their stories, still leaves room to observe what Matthew Flinders and his ilk achieved on other paths to understanding. Their charts and journals carry their own transforming power of discovery.

These revelations are also bound to extraordinary human stories. Had the four of us happened to be on Dutchmans Stern in late 1862, we might have seen a party on horseback pass by in the distance. Among them was a frail figure slung on a stretcher between two horses. Wracked by blindness and scurvy, this was the pint-sized Scotsman, John McDouall Stuart, being ferried by devoted companions across the last 960 kilometres back to Adelaide.

Burke and Wills, famously, never made it home. Despite the food and help given them by the Yandruwandha people, they had died 18 months earlier on the banks of the Cooper. Nearly 150 years on, debating which of these expeditions was the first to cross the continent seems pretty feeble—especially up against the clout of their stories, the gut-wrenching testaments to humanity beyond the brink.

How can anyone possibly imagine what these individuals endured? That's easy—just start walking inland. The great gift to all those with an itch to explore is that the brawling expanse of the interior is still out there, waiting. And don't think for a second that everything is discovered or that what's done is done. As long as these places remain, journeys long gone live on as visions and echoes. Go bush as you will, but keep your eyes and ears open.

There's another person we could have spotted from Dutchmans Stern. Had we walked a few months earlier we might have glimpsed a lone figure heading north towards the western shores of Lake Torrens. This was Jon Muir, at the start of a 1640 kilometre walk to the centre. Back in 2001, after three earlier attempts, he also walked alone across the continent, covering 2500 kilometres from Port Augusta to Burketown.

Jon does not re-enact anything. He's just out exploring, doing his thing. And he has talked of times when he's been woken by voices and chanting and stamping feet: 'The unmistakable sound of an corroboree. Every day I see evidence of their occupation of the land and feel their presence...I think I was hearing voices from the past.'

After 30 years of walking and climbing, Quentin Chester is still tapping into the call of the wild. He has written widely about his travels and tribulations, including books on Kaladji and the Kimberley, as well as many stories about his fervour for the Flinders Ranges. [qchester@senet.com.au](mailto:qchester@senet.com.au)



# Purnululu's Sandstone Playground

**Catherine Lawson explores Piccaninny Gorge in Western Australia's Kimberley**

THE WOMAN AT THE VISITOR CENTRE HAD US hooked from the start. 'Not many people head up Piccaninny Gorge', was all she needed to say. Having just spent a morning struggling to take tourist-free photos in overcrowded Echidna Gorge, we were desperate to escape the masses.

Widely touted as the longest and most spectacular gorge in Western Australia's extraordinary Purnululu National Park, Piccaninny Gorge lies beyond the park's famous orange-and-black banded beehive domes. This rugged route leads hardy walkers along the fluted bedrock of Piccaninny Creek to the 'five fingers'—five exceptional sandstone chasms scoured deep into the Bungle Bungle Range at the head of the gorge. With no signposts and no defined end point, walkers can explore the gorge for between two and seven days, rock hopping up narrow chasms until either curiosity or stamina is exhausted. Although designated as a bushwalking route, Piccaninny Gorge provides no facilities, and with no reliable water sources within the gorge, walkers must be prepared to seek it out, and endure daytime temperatures that top 45°C from September to December.

The ruggedness of the walk presents a remarkable opportunity at a time when so many tracks across the country are being 'softened up' by the heavy hand of development. The walk is a tough undertaking that only a few hundred people tackle each year, but Piccaninny's dramatic scenery easily eclipses other park vistas.

Left, the author watching restless bats overhead in the second finger. Right, the dark passageway through the second finger—who could resist?

All photos by David Bristow



And it's not just great views and solitude that await. Exploring the five fingers is big-time fun! It takes between four and five hours (walking time only) to reach a natural base camp at the entrance to the first finger, where you can pitch a tent and head off into the upper gorge. The more time you have requested on your park permit, the further your adventures can take you. Permits and a simple map with track notes are provided at the national park visitor centre upon payment of gorge camping fees. The route up the gorge is straightforward enough, although a topographical map would have added much more interest to our explorations.

Our lack of a map, however, was less of an issue than water availability. We arrived in early September, many months after the last wet season rains had fallen. Piccaninny Creek flows only briefly each year, and by late winter it had been reduced to a string of stagnant ponds of questionable quality.

The visitor centre staffer we quizzed before setting out was vague about just how much water we would find, so we decided to play it

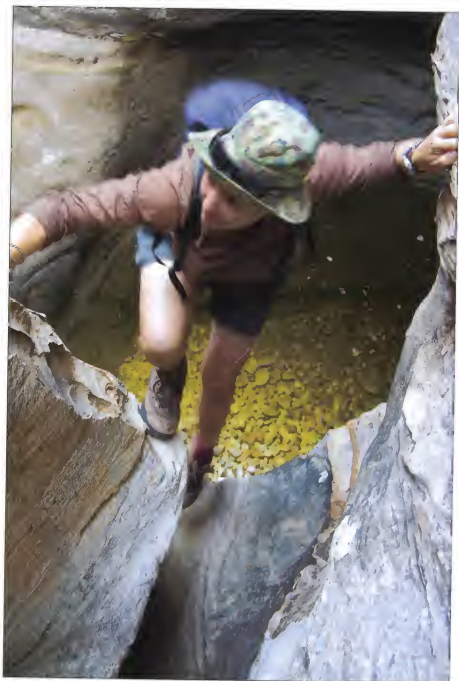
safe. The Kimberley is not the place to dice with dehydration. A combination of bladders and bottles allowed us to carry 12 litres of water, which we reckoned would get the two of us through the first day and night of the walk.

There was no way of knowing at what point along the route we would find potable water, or if in fact we would find any at all.

signposted interpretive track ended where the bedrock began: long parallel flutes, beautifully sculpted by the rocks that roll down the gorge during summer flash floods. Relishing the novelty of having no fixed path to follow, we meandered along the creek-bed, hopping between the flutes to avoid the deep, tiring patches of slippery pebbles and hot sand. With a hard sur-

## The walk at a glance

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Grade</b>            | Moderate to hard  |
| <b>Length</b>           | Two to seven days   |
| <b>Distance</b>         | Over 30 kilometres return   |
| <b>Type</b>             | Remote, exposed gorge   |
| <b>Region</b>           | Purnululu National Park, East Kimberley, Western Australia  |
| <b>Nearest Towns</b>    | Kununurra (306 kilometres north), Halls Creek (159 kilometres south-west).  |
| <b>Start/finish</b>     | Piccaninny Creek car park   |
| <b>Maps</b>             | Hema Purnululu National Park 1:225 000  |
| <b>Best Time</b>        | June to August (night temperatures around 10°C; days from 25 to 35°C).  |
| <b>Special Points</b>   | The park closes for the wet season from November to April. Access is for high-clearance four-wheel drives and off-road camper trailers only. You can obtain a free gorge walking permit on arrival from the visitor centre (open 8 am to midday and 1 pm to 4 pm daily). The track is fuel stove only, and make sure you take out all rubbish (including toilet paper). |
| <b>Fees</b>             | The national park entrance fee is \$10 for a vehicle; camping fees are \$5 for one person for one night in Piccaninny Gorge, and \$10 a person a night elsewhere in the park.   |
| <b>More Information</b> | Visit <a href="http://www.naturebase.net">www.naturebase.net</a> or phone the Purnululu National Park visitor centre on (08) 9168 7300 to check road conditions before you arrive.  |



The author heading up a nameless chasm in search of water.

But as we struggled into our rucksacks, packed tight with three days' worth of food and the usual camping gear, the hefty 12 kilograms of water was clearly enough of a burden. It wasn't until after we had lugged all that water through the first long, hot day that we discovered that what one walker calls a murky green pool, another will drink straight from the source.

Buoyant despite the heavy packs, we locked up our four-wheel drive and set out towards Piccaninny Creek, feeling happier and happier as the track gradually emptied of walkers. The

face beneath our boots, the first hour of the walk was fast and fun. Each bend in the gorge surprised us with fresh views of the Bungles' beehives, the geological phenomenon that draws about 44 000 visitors to the park every year.

Rising 300 metres above scorched spinifex plains, these orange-and-black banded rock domes are widely regarded as the world's most remarkable sandstone cone karst formations. Although they occur elsewhere on the Kimberley's eastern fringe and across the Northern Territory border in the Keep River National Park,



the beehives' most impressive panoramas are found at Purnululu. Formed 360 million years ago from sediments carried by ancient rivers, and sculpted by floodwaters, the beehive domes that dot this barren landscape owe their distinct colours to water. Moisture in some sedimentary layers allows black cyanobacteria to grow, but where the sediments dry out too quickly, the iron compounds oxidise, creating the alternating orange bands. The domes have attracted a World Heritage listing, which came two decades after a television documentary revealed the Bungle Bungle Range to many Australians for the very first time.

For all their renown, the domes cover only one fifth of the park's 239 723 hectares and, after seven pleasant kilometres on the track, they disappeared from our view altogether. Gone too was the firm-and-fast bedrock, replaced by a ribbon of coarse sand and stagnant rock pools that blocked our path, forcing us to boulder-hop and deviate into prickly fringing spinifex. Heavy packs, the relentless sun and trudging through sand and pebbles that swallowed our

hole. We stripped off, slid into the small, shallow pond and were instantly revived.

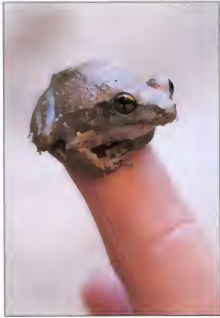
As we ventured beyond the Elbow, an unmarked zigzag in the creek-bed eight kilometres (three to four hours) from the track head, the scenery began to change. The distinct domes of the beehives merged, their dimpled horizon obscured by ever steepening gorge walls that sandwiched and shaded us. The colours changed too; orange-and-black beehive stripes smudged into smears of mottled rust on the rock. Our footprints in the sand covered the tiny tracks of echidnas, snakes, lizards, and birds. Where the sand disappeared, our boots crunched and crackled along cobblestones, as we weaved from side to side dodging boulders and murky pools.

By the time we reached Black Rock Pool, an hour after passing the Elbow, we had clearly suffered in the midday sun. Shaded throughout the day by narrow gorge walls, Black Rock Pool is the most reliable water source on the track and walkers are warned not to swim here to preserve the integrity of the water. Immediately identifiable by its sheer, black lichen walls, the

until the sun dropped beyond the gorge, then strolled the final three and a half kilometres to the area known as 'base camp', at the entrance to Piccaninny's first finger. A clear waterhole and broad beach of soft sand shaded by a single fan palm (*Livistona victorice*) makes for a most picturesque camp, just metres from where the first of many narrow chasms splits from Piccaninny Gorge. As the evening cooled down, we pitched our tent beside the water and stretched out in the sand with full mugs of hot tea, listening to the chorus of frogs and cicadas start up.

The sight of the first finger had us excited about heading into the upper gorge, especially without the burden of heavy packs. The following day, we decided to head as far up the gorge as possible before checking out one of the five fingers. According to our simple map, it was a three kilometre walk to the entrance of the furthestmost finger, No 3.

Setting off from base camp at dawn, the gorge became wonderfully narrow, focusing our attention on the brilliant colours and shapes of the sandstone walls. We had expected to reach No



**From left to right**, with no track, no signposts and no defined end point, Piccaninny Gorge offers a remarkable experience for the self-reliant walker. A little frog we could not identify, which was found in the upper reaches of the gorge. The author at base camp at sundown.



feet all added to the grief of too-tight rucksack straps.

At this point, just shy of a spot marked on the map only as 'The Elbow', we began to regret our late, 8.30 am departure from the car park. Preoccupied with adjusting rucksack straps to shift the weight around my body, I stumbled on slippery rocks and the ridiculous weight of my pack sent me crashing to the ground. Carrying almost half my body weight, my ratio of pack-to-girl weight was completely out, but I made a lucky escape with just two bloody knees, a lumpy head and a broken pair of sunglasses. On the bright side, I had packed spare sunnies and, since my partner insisted on lightening my load, all I needed was a quick dip to relieve my throbbing head.

Years of fortifying ourselves against all manner of tropical pond nasties meant we were not put off by the cool, albeit slightly green, water-

pool lies a short walk off the track up a boulder-strewn path, about 12.5 kilometres into the walk. You can't see the pool from the track, so we had our fingers crossed as we approached. Our park brochure warned that late in the dry season (from August to December), Black Rock Pool could dry up completely.

There was no such misfortune on our trip. The pool was broad and deep and the water so cool and sweet, we drank it straight from the pool and suffered no harm. Shattered by the relentless heat and the exhausting trudge through sand, shifting pebbles and water-smoothed rocks, we were reluctant to leave the water's edge and head back out into the 35°C heat.

The most comfortable time to walk the gorge would undoubtedly be just after the wet from June to August, when nights are cool (around 10°C), days are warm (25–35°C) and water is much more abundant. So we stayed in the shade

*Bats shifted overhead in a cool breeze as we waited in the dark for our eyes to adjust. Enormous rock slabs and fallen boulders formed a precarious roof where the midday sun sometimes penetrated, its seductive play of light dancing upon the sandstone walls.*

3 finger in about an hour, but constantly negotiating our way around rock pools, scrambling over boulders and along narrow ledges, kept our pace slow. Dozens of dead ends had us retracing our steps, and we were constantly choosing between skirting the ponds across high slopes of spiky spinifex (nature's acupuncturist) or plunging straight in for a wet walk.

There were other distractions too. Nameless chasms lured us in, 'just to take a look', and observing small creatures we found thriving in a seemingly desolate environment also delayed us. At the fifth finger, I discovered a tiny copper frog, sitting in the spot where I was just about to plant my boot. By mid-morning we had progressed a mere two and a half kilometres to the entrance of the second finger, and began to regret booking only three days in the gorge.

Beyond the enormous fig tree at its entrance, the second finger disappeared into a long, narrow alley. Bats shifted overhead in a cool breeze as we waited in the dark for our eyes to adjust. Enormous rock slabs and fallen boulders formed a precarious roof where the midday sun some-

double-barred finches fed in the grass and, while collecting water from a small fern-filled pool, we watched a snake trying its luck against a hundred juvenile frogs. Observant eyes will spot plenty of small creatures at dusk but, fortunately, are unlikely to discover any evidence of human visitation: no lolly wrappers, tea bags or cigarette butts.

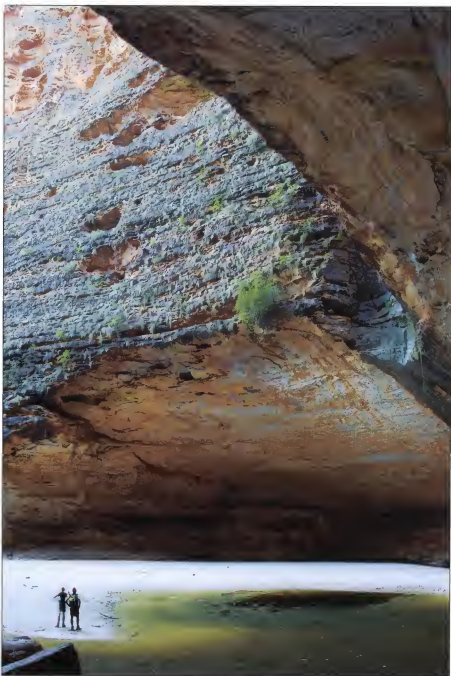
Rather than feel as though we were doing the same route in reverse, walking back in the cool of the morning we noticed more clearly the striking red gorge walls as they gradually morphed back into banded beehive domes. We took one last dip—a treat that couldn't be enjoyed in the rest of the park—and steeled ourselves for 'civilisation'. Once the first tour group of fresh-



times penetrated, its seductive play of light dancing upon the sandstone walls. As a lover of gaping chimney climbs, I found much to admire in the gorge, where 200 metre high walls were at times separated by just a few feet. Beyond the tunnel, we shimmied through slim rock chasms inhabited by hundreds of tiny frogs, which jumped on us as we disturbed the water. When the gorge eventually steepened into a stack of unclimbable boulders, we retraced our steps with regret.

Having heard so little about Piccaninny Gorge before we set out, we had underestimated its potential. Three days were not nearly enough to take advantage of all the fun on offer. But, while we were tempted to stay longer, the possibility that our delayed return would trigger a search and rescue made it unthinkable.

Despite our regrets, there were small pleasures on the walk back to base camp: a flock of



Purnululu's spectacular Cathedral Gorge attracts big crowds, but is still worth a visit if you come to explore Piccaninny Gorge.

As we settled into sleep, we pondered just how 'untouched' a walking destination could feel when everyone carried out his or her litter (including a snap-lock bag of used toilet paper). Around 4 am, we awoke to find a full moon directly overhead, illuminating the gorge with strokes of unbelievable silver light. It was a very pleasant wake-up call, and we lingered over an early cuppa, packed up camp and hit the track at 6 am, determined to avoid the worst of the day's heat and vowing enthusiastically to return.

smelling walkers passed by, it was all over. But our 'recce' had proved one thing: Piccaninny Gorge was one hell of a playground that promised enough adventure for a return visit some time in the future. 📍

Serious wanderlust and a passion for adventure keeps travel and food writer Catherine Lawson on the road year-round. Shanning her travels with photographer and partner David Binstow, the pair rarely leave the Tropics, dividing their time between exploring Australia's Top End and South-east Asia.

# The **edge** of darkness

## Beau Miles sea kayaks the southern coast of Africa

IT WAS ALWAYS AMBITIOUS, A 4000 KILOMETRE paddle from one side of southern Africa to the other, the invisible Tropic of Capricorn on the eastern and western coasts of the giant continent marking the start and finish of the journey. To make it easy to comprehend, the trip was segmented. It started with 600-odd kilometres of remote, townless beaches off Mozambique's coastline in the sticky heat of the tropics, combating mosquitoes, twisted winds, sickly warm water and endless sand, before hitting South Africa. Then followed 2500 kilometres of famous surf breaks, wild, untamed sections of cliff, ten-hour days and the overwhelming problem of nowhere to come ashore—no 'out' when things went wrong—as well as pirates, sharks and the potent mixing of two very different oceans, the Indian and the Atlantic.

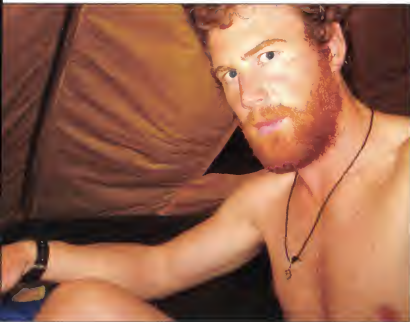
Africa's southern coast is home to some of the most spectacular, intimidating horns and capes in the world. Lighthouses on every jut of land have borne witness to some of the most torturous shipwrecks in sailing history. Namibia, the last 1000 kilometres, was the great unknown. Virtually unpaddled, the coastline of the oldest desert in the world had hardly any freshwater, no towns, no headlands to hide behind, and no real information available on the Web (or any where else, it seemed). It was a case of 'get there and get busy asking questions'. Diamond-mining superpowers would have to be persuaded to let us land on their beaches, and food—well, like water, I hadn't figured that out yet. I'd allowed five months for the trip.

Paddling with me for the first 100 kilometres would be Jared Sharples from New Zealand. His pure Kiwi ethic was as tough as old boots. Beginning in Massinga, 15 kilometres north of the Tropic of Capricorn, among coconut palms and thatched huts, Jared planned to leave the expedition after pulling into the high-rise metropolis of Durban. All going to plan, I would continue on alone.

Since my last major trip four years earlier, across the Great Australian Bight, I had been planning on paddling Africa. The build-up, after years of delays, was deeply etched with fear and exhilaration. Principally without support, this paddle had never been done. Not like this.

These young Mozambique boys appeared out of nowhere on the first day, helping Beau Miles and Jared into the ocean. All uncredited photos Beau Miles





## 25 January 2007

'I don't sit still well. Never have. My jam toast fell face down a few days ago and set a trend. Getting fat and healthy is perhaps the biggest upshot of waiting, two weeks now, for Jared's kayak. It makes me tired and wary and strung out, and I can't explain it more than that. When you're ready, you know, and when things change, so does that feeling. It has taken years to get here and further delays just give me dangerous time to think. I need to be on the water. The longer I wait the more I question everything and think how damned foolish this whole thing is.'

*Excerpt from letter to family while in Johannesburg awaiting Jared's kayak*

After weeks of paperwork, finger pointing and painfully slow explanations to customs, Jared's kayak, *Lemonade*, arrived dismantled, in three pieces. Our kayaks were finally outfitted.

The prospect of sinking my toes into Mozambique's coast, 1000 kilometres away, having only done a fly-by on Google Earth, was enough to keep me sleepless during the two-day bus ride. As on any respectable voyage in the back blocks, chickens and goats filled the small gaps between people on the bus. If an armchair was unoccupied, the bus driver would make sure it was filled. I hadn't packed deodorant—far too luxurious. I was in like-minded company.

In a red-headed moment in the sweltering customs building at the Mozambique border, I demanded my change for the entry visa. The bus was held up while my passport disappeared behind doors. Immediate diplomacy had to be entered into. In the background a man was beaten during questioning. The mood was hot and volatile and reeked of corruption. I hated my first taste of Mozambique.

## 2 February 2007

With armoured guards looking over me, barefoot in Mum's nursing scrubs, I belted my kayak's rudder pin, which had bent in transit. Down the road, on the beach in the sticky heat, Jared packed our kayaks, stuffing them to the gunnels with 30 litres of water, ten days' worth of food, and gear for the next few months. Eight hours later, a handful of young boys came out of nowhere and pushed us into the Indian Ocean. The refreshing, all-smiles friendliness of the boys was a world away from the corruption of their older countrymen days earlier. A lump of wood couldn't have smacked the grin off my face. My thoughts were thick and choked as I pulled through the first strokes of the trip.

Breeding sea turtles offered a distraction from the chafing, the strung-out electricity in the blood, and the virginal, almost lactic paddle arms of day one. Like farmers on country roads, these magnificent creatures nodded their heads softly before continuing on their way. Puffed and unfit from too many months in London, Jared's arms still tickled over. His contentment coming from a life spent on the ocean, and lately, not enough time near one. I was equally chuffed to be heading south along Africa's coast. The drunken decision to 'try Africa' felt like yesterday—it was four years ago.

A tricky landing over high-tide rocks plunked us almost directly over the Tropic of Capricorn. Through jackhammer Kiwi snoring, I slept like the dead.

## 12 February 2007

Ten days of productive paddling were behind us. Averaging 25 kilometres a day, our bodies were being tenderised by the six to eight hours of daily paddling. Our bums were fast developing a memory for the hard, wet, mean seats. We had glued and bolted on ad hoc seat padding to give us relief but, like most items of indulgence, it was eaten by the sea. If something wasn't resistant to salt, sun, water and friction, it wouldn't last.

Jared and I settled into an on-water relationship that had us paddling by ourselves for most of the day. I have never worked well with others in similar circumstances. You have to deal with the rigour, the head game, the joy and pain of it by yourself. Time and energy spent worrying about niggling, unfixable problems needs to be non-existent, especially early on. Jared was certainly not a complainer, so each of us dealt with our own problems. It makes a trip like this very introverted—getting on with the job. One benefit, however, was that it made our irregular conversations a treat, and through this daily separation on the water our friendship seemed to strengthen. We were also bound together by the hardship. If my left hamstring was on fire, Jared's back would be playing up. When my fingers started to bubble with sunburn, Jared lost the feeling in his extremities. If I was feeling bad, chances were he was as well. Likewise with the highs: if spinner dolphins were putting on an aerial show, we'd down paddles, silenced by the timing and magnificence of our meeting. Rafting up alongside each other every couple

*If my left hamstring was on fire, Jared's back would be playing up. When my fingers started to bubble with sunburn, Jared lost the feeling in his extremities.*





15 February 2007

9 March 2007

of hours, like two lost sardines bobbing around a few kilometres off shore, we would eat. Glucose biscuits, bread, sweet hard-boiled lollies and a treat—a boat-hold while the other pissed into a bottle, trying not to miss. I tended to miss a lot, distracted with stretching and generally having a poor aim. It took weeks for my pea brain to figure out that the bottle needed an air outlet. On several occasions I wore it, literally, after pressure build-up backfired, exploding the contents. A bloody good laugh when light moments were scarce.

If conditions allowed, and only during these initial few weeks, we enjoyed the luxury of stopping for lunch. The norm became six to nine hours at a time. Days of 35°C and nights of 25°C meant most of my packed clothing (packed for the cold water of the Atlantic) was sitting as heavy, unused ballast. Steep beach breaks caused hassles with head-dumping capsize and spread gear along several hundred metres of beach. Breaking ropes and bending rudders were an endless punishment. Sardines were eaten raw from gnarly tin tops and magnificent Mozambique bread (inherited from Portuguese colonials) would go soggy and taste like my day hatch—a bread roll that tastes like O-ring grease, sunscreen and duct tape epitomises our Mozambique diet. I daydreamed about strange taste combinations; I fancied a 'Croc, spare bolts and tent pole' flavoured loaf from my local Bakers Delight, cracking a smile to myself, feeling like an idiot. I'll take six.

We had been stuck 300 odd kilometres north of Maputo for days with a fierce, steep beach break, whittling away the oven-hot afternoons reading under coconut trees. We shuffled around their bases in pursuit of the shade while throwing coconuts at each other; we suffered an all-day paranoia of being clocked on the head with the large, milk-filled bombs. As the weather got messier, we finished our half-dozen small-print novels. The beautiful Mozambique Channel was impossibly close, untouchable, with the boat-smashing shore break keeping us at bay.

I had a moment: strong, sugared coffee, dusty bread rolls and Sunday singing amongst the flowering cashew trees and towering coconut palms. The brightly coloured locals reaffirmed faith in humanity and gave water to strangers. Genuine, beautiful people. I didn't want to be anywhere else in the world, which was just as well: the local elder declared the shore break would stay for the week. I envied them amongst their families, in such a lovely place—the simplicity of it all. Sure enough, conditions worsened. The cyclonic rains of Fevola, 1500 kilometres north, flooded the famous Zambezi River and surrounding valleys, churning the Mozambique Channel into a nasty soup of whitecaps and airborne salt. Looking south towards South Africa was depressing. I couldn't see past the next sand dune. The future of the paddle had vanished into the sea.

Jared was sick, really sick. Our single night spent away from the open ocean, tucked in the lee of an island ten days earlier, had been war with mosquitoes. Like a wayward eyelash, there was a constant out-of-focus black fuzz blurring the vision. Dusk was absurd: with no sea breeze to keep the millions of insects at bay, we were easy fodder.

Now, laid out in the tent, all the signs pointed to malaria. It made sense—malaria is rampant in Mozambique (along with AIDS). Holed up in Mozambique's war-torn Elephant Conservation Park (where nearly all the elephants have been poached) while waiting for a fierce southerly to abate, we made the decision to get him out. He needed drugs, and I couldn't wait any longer.

With barely enough energy to stand, Jared dragged me into the shore break, holding my bow into the waves. His energy was sapped, he couldn't stand the sight of food and his tan looked bleached. I would miss his company, his advice, his card-playing ability and, lately, his knack of losing. One idea summed it up: a good day with Jared was pretty tough, a bad day without him would be bloody awful. Squinting into the sun, the bright new day was the start of paddling solo, unassisted, down the wilderness of the African coast. I didn't know what to think, I just knew I had to keep going. Get on with things. Heck, this was what I had originally cooked up: solo.

*I had a moment: strong, sugared coffee, dusty bread rolls and Sunday singing amongst the flowering cashew trees and towering coconut palms.*

**From left to right, the author tent-bound for five days while epic swells buffeted the northern coast of South Africa. After three weeks of salt, sun and paddling, fingertips were raw with rot and blisters. Jared Sharples' Easterly, side-ways winds were a constant. Around Danger Point near Cape Town on big, scary seas with whales watching.**



**21 March 2007**

I hadn't lost sight of the tent in five days. A number of things had kept me pretty close: sand—horizontally airborne grains the size of caster sugar; the sun—biting, egg-white heat rings in a cloudless sky, and no man-sized shade to speak of; and the sea—a giant, Patrick-Swayze-heading-out-to-sea-during-a-50-year-storm type sea. Perfectly, I was alone, waiting for it all to end.

The summer anthem of sun, surf and sand was an irony not lost on me when Robbie Buck of Triple J (during my weekly cross to Australian radio), likened my situation to being on holiday. I guffawed a little on the link, but I was in serious lockdown, rationing water, food, reading material and radio time—radio being the only powered object on board that solar power couldn't top up. The sea was epic. (I would later find out my isolated patch of wilderness coast looked out over the biggest swell in living memory.) I had a front row seat on eight to ten metre swells, peeling off perfect waves, row after row to the horizon. Plumes several stories high would rush skyward off the face of the waves, tormented by the offshore buster. The earth-laden winds of Africa's interior clashed with the coast in a red and blue moment that you could actually see. It churned for three days. By the time the equinox had passed, the spring tide ebbed, the storm swell abated and the whipping tail winds of the cyclone further north blown out, I had been walking around my small patch of beach for almost a week. A coastguard aircraft had found me, circling most afternoons and reading my car-sized 'okay' in the sand, before tipping its wings and continuing on its way. It took me two days, one smashed rudder, a few deep breaths and the delivery of supplies by some good folks from Sodwana Bay before I got back out to sea. I waved blindly from behind the last set of breakers, not daring to look back.



**25 March 2007**

I must have a bloody great target on my forehead. The last few days had been filled with rogue, scary-as-hell waves. I'd been dumped by several shore breaks over the weeks, but these deep-sea buggers were a whole new ball game. They would put an end to things—boat-killers. When you notice one—usually just the one—you don't talk, you can't, this shouldn't be happening. Talking would make it real, and who's listening anyway?

Faculties gather in the foot, toeing hard on the left rudder, before the rest of the body kicks in, paddling like mad into the wave's face, hitting it straight on with as much speed as possible. Charging every muscle in the body to get you over before the crown of the wave cracks and sucks, pulling towards land in a cacophony of all things nightmarish. The sound alone is terrifying. The heave of air a person takes in before a car crash—the unbelieving that time has run out. It's a thousand of these gasps, and you hear it as you whir away into the wave's face, scared as heck.

I would go hoarse in the aftermath. Swearing fits while shaking, wanting to piss, veins in my neck swelling, hands jumpy and heart in my ears, drumming. 'Where in the name of hell did that come from! Two hours of bloody energy in a minute! Looking over its immense wake from behind, I pushed on, bewildered, damned to the fate of the next big one.



**1 April 2007**

There's lots going on in my head and I am enjoying the struggle, hardship, beauty, freedom, lost-ness and uniqueness of it all. My little yellow tent and pasta at the end of the day is a religion in its own right. My body is starting to feel the pain of two months of paddling. In a way I am as strong as I've ever been, able to paddle for as long and as hard as the fuel will carry me with a cadence that continually gets higher and more efficient (I paddled 32 kilometres in 5 hours, 45 minutes on Friday, fuelled by the fear of a southerly buster that can come on like a light and change a day from brilliant to utter hell in seconds). I have a dicky left shoulder that I can't sleep on. My broken toe (stubbed on driftwood) is okay. Yep, paddle around southern Africa in high winds, unknown seas, with sharks the size of Volkswagen following, and my one great ailment is a stubbed toe. Not very romantic at all!

It's about routine really. I pee into my little bottle, eat every two hours and don't turn the GPS on for fear of not having gone as far as I thought. Just aim for a speck of headland and go for it. Chafe is chronic on my left side as Africa is on my right, meaning the landward wind blows all of my paddle spray across me. My beard is plush and thick and I look the part. In fact, I look like I should be able to walk on this water instead of paddle through it. Strike that—I look more like Ned Kelly, hopelessly lost in the wrong place in the wrong era.

*I had a front row seat on eight to ten metre swells, peeling off perfect waves, row after row to the horizon. Plumes several stories high would rush skyward off the face of the waves, tormented by the offshore buster.*



## The tip of the continent, 20 April 2007

My wrist felt as though it had fused. My new paddle from Durban was stiff and mean and not flexible enough to pull the weight of an expedition kayak. Jared was doing great, but the trip had changed. It felt different. Having spent a month alone while Jared was in Great Britain recovering, I was in a different head space. I had suffered a little and lost something. Furthermore, it was the home stretch, a slog against the remaining time, holding together the body and mind to see things through. So much had happened, and it was strange being back in company. It felt like a different trip.

We broke the kayaks down for a bus ride to Mossel Bay, for the final push to Cape Town. It breaks the feeling of the trip when we chop out a section, not just the geography of it. It feels like going through the motions and I hate that; destinationitis, the curse of expedition travel.



...two very large sharks proved the theory that yellow is their preferred colour. Jared watched as two 12-foot bodies tailed my 15-foot vessel for 15 minutes.




## 10 May 2007

Lots happened on the home run. Identical twin nephews were born in Australia and I got drunk on anti-inflammatories and beer during a few stormy days. We slogged bang-on into 20-knot winds around the famous Danger Point, dodging coastal blemishes in an intense sea. Whales surfacing at arm's length barely broke our rhythm. We completed a rare crossing of False Bay the wrong way, and had to constantly baboonproof our kayaks from these insanely self-assured invaders. A world authority on kayaking, Johan Loots, guided us around the coast with phone calls, advice and home cooking, while two very large sharks proved the theory that yellow is their preferred colour. Jared watched as two 12-foot bodies tailed my 15-foot vessel for 15 minutes. I felt important and strangely calm, annoyed that I didn't get a better look at them. Having almost been totally wrecked by a Cape of Good Hope wave earlier that morning, I was feeling okay with things, ready for a nudge—maybe even secretly hoping for it.

Fifteen kilometres from Cape Town Harbour, 100 days after leaving Mozambique, I capsized on to my head, smashing the camera mount and losing the camera. I gashed my head and had my booties ripped from my feet and the paddle torn from my grip. The harbourmaster wanted our blood when we didn't follow international protocols—cruising in through tankers and tugs. The local police couldn't guarantee our kayaks would be safe when we left them at their station. Barefoot, with a borrowed paddle, I'm done.

## Flight over Antarctica, 20 May 2007

"Big" sums up the southern coast of the giant continent, where the scale of things can sometimes seem too big for a lifetime of paddling, let alone a day, a week, a month, a year. My ambition is to make people appreciate scale: distance, speed, movement. We have left it behind, whizzing along at 120 kilometres an hour, nattering on the phone with an instant coffee in our laps. We have lost what it means to get to places under our own steam, calling on our bodies, our own puff, to move us forward, even if only for short distances. Not only does 50 kilometres of coastline potentially change your life, but at five or six kilometres an hour, you see it with such intimacy, you can't help but take notice. It's consuming. You can't help it.

You have to regress a little, go back to being held captive by the weather, the natural pacesetter of such travel. Your body and thoughts are your orchestra. You feel like the centre of the universe and you have enough time to realise that, compared with the thing you are floating on, you are nothing at all. Just a paddler, paddling down the coast. 

Homeward bound diary entry

From left to right, the view over the camera at the famous Cape Point, the impressive neighbour of the Cape of Good Hope. The bush telegraph, the locals, after random appearances by two small boats, started to pass the message south that we needed supplies, women walked in fruit and men water—we looked forward to our meetings. The author packing two kayaks into one when Jared became sick and had to leave. The Durban skyline looms from the shipping channel; after 100 kilometres of mostly unpopulated wilderness coastline, the shock of skyscrapers was a jolt to the system. Gareth Gordon

Beau Miles enjoys an unnatural attraction to golf ball hunting, probably due to a grandfather doing nothing but 'bird nesting' (climbing trees to poach bird eggs) for most of his childhood. Otherwise a filmmaker, teacher, guide and builder

# Last Legs of an **Alpine** Odyssey

**Geoff Mosley completes the  
Australian Alps Walking Track,  
an odyssey of both personal  
and conservation significance**

**I ALWAYS WONDER WHETHER MY ALPS WALK WAS THE LONGEST IN** history. To give you some idea of how long it took, the night before we set out from Canberra we stayed in a house full of conscripts who were about to leave on a more fateful and dangerous journey—to Vietnam.

If anything, this strengthened our feeling of good fortune as we contemplated the weeks that lay ahead. The night was 13 November 1971 and Niels Becker and I were going to attempt to be the first to walk the full length of the Alps from Canberra to Walhalla. At the end of the first stage, at Tom Groggin, we were to be joined in our endeavour by (the late) Ken Myer.

I finally finished the walk on 18 December 2007 with my son Robin, who had been two years old when I first set out. As you may have already gathered, not everything went according to plan. The aim of the walk was twofold: first, to experience the particular pleasures associated with a long-distance walk, and secondly, to advance the cause of alpine conservation—a mixture of pleasure and pain, one might say.

Following in the footsteps of Myles Dunphy, who had proposed the cross-border Snowy–Indi National Park and Primitive Area in the 1930s, the aim was to extend this concept to a single alpine national park taking in all of the alpine country from the Brindabellas in the ACT to the Baw Baw Plateau near Walhalla in Victoria. Two years earlier, I had set out the case for this greater alpine national park, and also for action on the proposed Tri State Trail running the full length of the Alps, in the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) viewpoint publication *The High Country*. The conservation aim of our trek was to publicise and demonstrate the feasibility of both objectives.

The story of the first three stages of our 19-day walk from Canberra to Mt Skene was published in the *Australian* on 8 February 1972 with the title 'Walking Across the Roof of Australia'. So what went wrong? Why did we stop at Mt Skene, about four days short of our target? I suppose the short answer is that the walk took its toll on our health, sometimes in ways we could never have imagined.

**A pool of water on the Baw Baw Plateau, Baw Baw National Park. David Tuttnall**







On the second day, before we reached the snow-plastered heights of the Main Range, Niels twisted his knee and lost his parka. On day eight, climbing up the slopes of Mt Pinnibar, he decided to pull out. Later, Ken suffered a similar injury, and at Glen Valley called for his chauffeur and also returned to civilisation. Unfortunately, there must have been something wrong with the water Ken and I obtained from ditches originally dug for gold sluicing at Glen Valley, because the next day both of us experienced a serious stomach upset with violent bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea. Somehow I manage to drag myself over the Bogong High Plains to Mt Hotham but, still feeling very weak, decided to spend an unscheduled couple of days recuperating in nearby Harrierville.

By now Niels was sufficiently recovered to rejoin the walk and we continued on to Mt Skene. Here we had food waiting for the final stage, but now it was my turn to experience a physical problem in the form of severe pain in both feet. (Years later I discovered what had wrecked my arches. When my boots finally fell apart, two very solid, totally unbendable pieces of steel were revealed—they were rockclimbing boots!) I was also close to running out of leave from the ACF. So that was the end of the walking part of the odyssey.

When we reached Mt Skene we calculated that we had covered about 580 kilometres of map distance, an average of about 30 kilometres a day. With another 120 kilometres to go, four days had seemed about right for the last stage in 1971. Now, however, I was 36 years older, and we were more cautious and on the resumed walk allowed five days for it. The Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT) is, of course, now a reality, having been completed in its full length in 1995. The main difference this made to our trip now was that, instead of working out our route unaided, as we had done in 1971, we spent quite a lot of time looking for the yellow AAWT track markers.

At midday on 3 April 2007 a passing galah would have seen Robin and me trying to find our 1971 finish point at the end of the Barkly River Road—this is where we intended to start from. Misreading the map, we started a few kilometres too soon. Once again we had feelings of both exhilaration and trepidation, the latter sensation because of the major fires which had affected this area during the summer. Would we find our route barred by fallen trees, the water unfit for drinking? There was only one way to find out.

*The scene around our campsite was reminiscent of those photographs of the First World War battlefields—fire-blasted trees lying all around, and some snapped off halfway up as though hit by shells.*

As we left the Jamieson to Licola road and climbed up towards the summit of Mt Shillinglaw, the sight of the trees beginning to reshoot provided some reassurance. On reaching the top we experienced our first navigational challenge. Which was the right spur for the 700 metre drop to the Black River?

Investigating the different options, we soon found a red marker for MacMillans Track and wondered if this was coincident with the Alpine Track. Eventually, using a compass, we found the route and a reassuring AAWT marker and set off into the depths of the Black River valley. The intense fire had destroyed all of the ground vegetation and burnt into the soil to create a loose, unstable mass. We soon found that the best way to deal with this on the steepest slopes was to engage in a kind of tacking movement. Even so, at day's end on the banks of the Black River I discovered that the nails of my big toes had taken a severe beating.

The scene around our campsite was reminiscent of those photographs of the First World War battlefields—fire-blasted trees lying all around, and some snapped off halfway up as though hit by shells. Fortunately,

our concerns about polluted water were quickly dispelled when we found crystal-clear water flowing over a bed of quartz flakes in a little side stream close by our tents.

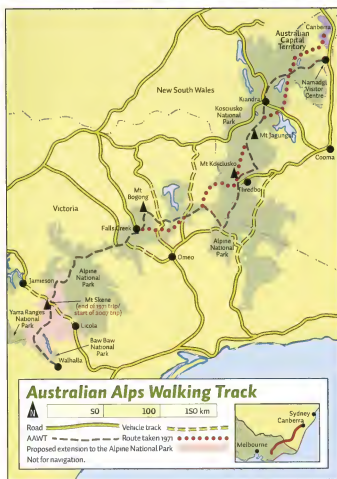
The next morning we came face to face with an obstacle. John Siseman's guide to the AAWT counsels the walker to either 'battle through the scrub along the river bank or take the easier route and walk up the middle of the river'. The problem was that the Black River was now full of fallen trees and the only option was to struggle along the



steep, crumbling slopes, scrub free for the time being, crossing the river several times to avoid even steeper slopes.

Next we began the 740 metre climb up to Champion Spur and Fiddlers Green. How much water to carry when walking on the ridgetops is a question every walker needs to deal with—after a very dry winter and summer, it was particularly important to us. Perhaps unreasonably, we set our hopes on a dam marked on the map and mentioned by Siseman. It turned out to be bone dry. We did find some dirty brown water in a

ditch, but this was not enough, especially when we realised that because of my slow progress we would need to camp that night on the tops. Reaching the Walhalla to Matlock road we were reduced to begging water from motorists. Three out of the four vehicles we hailed stopped and although they each had very little, combined it was just enough to see us through



## Proposed western extension of the Alpine National Park

The concept of a continuous national park along the top of Australia was first conceived some 40 years ago and, although much has been achieved, there is still a major gap in Victoria between the Baw Baw and Alpine National Parks. Unfortunately, the objective of national park contiguity, supported by the ACF, the Victorian National Parks Association and the Australian Academy of Science, was a casualty of the division of this country into separate Land Conservation Council study areas.

The filling of this gap by westward extension of the Alpine Park would not only achieve contiguity and the protection of the intervening valleys. It would also link up with the Yarra Ranges National Park and create the possibility of a chain of protected areas all the way from Canberra to the outskirts of Melbourne. The proposal has already received a supportive response from the Federal Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett.

A tentative boundary, with the AAWT at its core, is shown on the accompanying map. Significantly, the extension could include the catchment area of Lake Thomson, Melbourne's principal water storage, preparing the way for a phase-out of logging and an increase in water yields.

*Clockwise from bottom left, the author in the Baw Baw National Park, not far from Stronachs Camp. Geoff and his son Robin near the start of their walk and the end of Geoff's 1971 attempt. Geoff crossing the aptly named Black River which was choked with fallen trees, making negotiating it difficult.*

*All uncredited photos by the author*



until we reached the Jordan River the next day. Our campsite that night was beyond the westernmost edge of the fire-affected area.

For most of its route in this section the AAWT follows fire tracks. Some of these are unbelievably steep. In fact the Western Alps region we were now traversing is the most highly dissected part of the whole Alps. As a result the walk-in cross-section involves an up-and-down, yo-yo-like movement. The automatic response for me on the steepest parts was to shout up to Robin, who was always ahead: 'Throw me down a rope, please'.

night and when I woke up I discovered why—my sleeping bag was dripping wet. Working in the dark the night before, I had inadvertently put my sleeping bag into my outer bivvy bag with the latter inside out. It proved just how effective this microfibre bag is in stopping the movement of moisture, in this case in stopping it from getting out!

'Why do you always have so many issues, Dad?' was Robin's comment. The previous night he had also reflected on the inadequacy of my equipment. Both my tent (a Paddy Pallin 'Era' wall tent), and my sleeping bag



But he was used to my slowness by now and his reply was always, 'Come on, Dad!' Watching Robin, I could see the strong walker I had been when I started the walk in 1971. Compared with when I took him walking as a young lad, our weight-carrying roles were now reversed. This time he was carrying the stove and the bulk of the food.

On the third day we began with a roller-coaster walk along Victor Spur. Here at last we were free of the fire tracks. The map, with some truth, told us the position of the track was 'doubtful'. Surprisingly, on this ridgetop we found several pieces of abandoned mining machinery. How on earth did they get water to these high places, we wondered. Finally, we dropped down to the Jordan River and saw the old gold workings and the site of the former mining settlements of Red and Blue Jacket. Climbing up to Caspar Creek Track, we reached the summit of Mt Easton, where we were once more freed from the dreaded fire tracks until we dropped down to a campsite on the Thomson River. At about 470 metres, this is the lowest point on the whole route from Canberra to Walhalla.

The next day, high above the Thomson Dam, we found that the track had been temporarily diverted to the edge of an alpine ash logging area because of fallen trees. Remarkably, in light of the fact that the Thomson is Melbourne's principal water source, the coupes appeared to be enormous in size. That night we set up our camp just inside the boundary of Baw Baw National Park. The track into the park was hard to find because of two missing track markers, one of which appeared to have been deliberately burnt.

Away from the logging coupes and fire tracks, we made camp early, with a gale roaring through the tall trees overhead. I had a very restless

were the same items I had used in 1971, and both were now 46 years old.

Everything about the next day was a wonderful improvement on the country we had been walking through. Gone were the fire tracks and the impact of miners and loggers. All around was nature at its best. The park was established in 1979 and is now free of the cattle that used to graze at places like 'Mustering Flat'. The walking track was clear for a few kilometres but once we reached the end, it was obscured by shoulder-height shrubs. It was Easter and the plateau was alive with bushwalkers, some camping and others on day walks. We stopped for lunch and to dry out my sleeping bag at the remains of the old hut near Mt Whitelaw. If it had not been destroyed in the 1939 bushfires we would have been celebrating its 100th birthday. The Whitelaw hut was one of three along the 82 kilometre Yarra Track developed by the Public Works Department between 1901 and 1907 for walkers. It ran from Warburton to Walhalla—a prototype for today's long-distance walking tracks.

'Glorious' is hardly an adequate word for the scenery of the Baw Baw Plateau. Amongst the moss-covered granite boulders we came across a wide range of plant communities, from snow gums and patches of cool temperate rain forest to tussock grasslands and wet alpine heaths. Water was plentiful. We found an excellent campsite in the mid-afternoon but decided to press on towards Talbot Peak, encouraged by the news from a walker that there were lots of good campsites ahead. Unfortunately, we had difficulty finding them and the one we settled on was far from sheltered.

We had a strong frost and although I had all my clothes on I hardly slept a wink. To make things worse I now had an upset stomach and my



left knee was hurting. This part of my body was another victim of the unexpected—this time a full bottle of water ‘footy passed’ into my tent by a kind son but which, in the fading light, I didn’t see coming, and which hit my knee with considerable force.

We walked on for another ten kilometres and reached the Mt Erica car park by midday. It was exactly five days since we had started out but we were still some 22 kilometres short of Walhalla. Our time had run out and we would need to return to complete the journey. ‘You have paid the price for your terrible equipment’, was the comment from my long-suffering son. This was certainly true of my tent and sleeping bag, but my boots were relatively new and adequate and yet the nails on both my big toes fell off soon after my return home.

On 18 December, Robin and I were back at the Mt Erica car park to finish the job. Much of this section was downhill, taking us back again to the Thomson River, and was a breeze. Had I been a few years younger we could have run it. As it was, at a more leisurely pace, in wonderful weather, we were able to take in more of the scenery and the remnants of the Walhalla district’s golden era, including an old tramway which the AAWT follows for the last eight kilometres. Halfway down we met a couple of young walkers on the first day of their walk to Canberra. I could not help telling them that this was my last day and that I hoped their trip would not take so long.

The kind heart of Walhalla is the General Store and Miner’s Café, where Rhonda and Norm Aquilina have for many years provided voluntary assist-

mechanism for alpine cooperation. This became a reality with the signing in July 1986 of a memorandum of understanding for cooperative management of the Australian Alps National Parks. The removal of cattle from the Victorian Alpine National Park proved to be a more intractable problem, finally being achieved in 2005–2006 thanks to the persistent advocacy of the Victorian National Parks Association.

There are other conservation peaks still to climb in the region, one of them being the gaining of World Heritage status for the Alps and the adjacent forest parks. This would protect a unique part of the world’s heritage, displaying all the changes which occur in the distinctive Australian vegetation on the 2200 metre climb from the sea to the snow. Here, there also needs to be one or more walking tracks, starting at the coast and meeting up with the AAWT, following in the footsteps and honouring the ancient pathways of the indigenous people of the south-east.

I think I implied that there are as many rough spots along the conservation way as along the track. One of these was the rejection in 2005 of



ance to AAWT walkers. In our case Norm drove us back to our vehicle at the Mt Erica car park.

What of that other, parallel part of the journey—the conservation saga? In the 36 years since the start of my walk a great deal had been achieved but, like the ridges we walked along, with many ups and downs. Working to have new national parks established in the ACT and the alpine parts of Victoria was a slog (requiring the same qualities involved in long-distance walking), but there is now continuous national park land all the way from Canberra’s back door to a point near Mt McDonald to the east of Mt Skene. There is still a 60 kilometre gap between there and the northern boundary of Baw Baw National Park (the scene of our fourth stage walk)—another challenge for the future (see box).

What about cooperative management of these parks, lying in the separate jurisdictions of New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT? The breakthrough came in 1984 when, as Director of the ACF (and with the on-ground help of Alec Costin and Dane Wimbush), I arranged for 15 members of the Victorian Parliament, including the Minister for Conservation, to visit Kosciuszko National Park to see how things were done in a cattle-free park. The hosts were the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the New South Wales Minister for Conservation. On the last day of the visit, at Daners Gap, the ministers agreed to develop a permanent

my nomination of the Alpine National Park for the National Heritage List on the grounds that it was either ‘vexatious, or frivolous’ or ‘not made in good faith’. One of my sins seemed to have been that I had stressed the importance of the cross-border wilderness area in the Cobberas/Mt Pilot area. Myles Dunphy would have turned in his grave. Or would he? I think he would have been more likely to redouble his efforts to reach the distant conservation goals which still beckoned and to remind us that worthwhile goals often take time to achieve.

A young bushwalker never thinks of growing old. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but it does happen! The main thing is to carry on while you still can. ☺

Geoff Masley, former CEO of the Australian Conservation Foundation, and a bushwalker for over 60 years, is the Coordinator of the Alps and Forests World Heritage Working Group and this year’s winner of the World Environment Day Individual Award.

**From far left to right, the AAWT follows many fire tracks near the end, including this one of Champion Spur. One of the yellow AAWT markers.**

**Both photos John Chapman Robin patiently waiting for the author, who was always lagging behind his son. Geoff with his ancient tent; in the old days if there weren’t any sticks around for the poles, campers would sleep with their legs in the air instead.**



# THE *Jatbula* Trail

**Andrew Davison enjoys the wilderness and rich cultural history of Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park in the Northern Territory**

NITMILUK IS AN ANCIENT LAND. IT WAS CREATED IN A TIME KNOWN as 'Buwarr' (dreaming), when ancestors of the Jawoyn people journeyed across the country creating the land, bringing it to life with plants and animals and laying down the Jawoyn law. The time of Buwarr also gave the Jawoyn their language, kinship systems and knowledge of plants and animals as food and medicine.

Title to the land that is known as the Nitmiluk National Park was handed back to the Jawoyn people, its traditional owners, in 1989. Leased to the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, the park is managed under traditional practices according to Jawoyn law, by a board largely consisting of Jawoyn people.

The park is known for its series of 13 magnificent gorges, sculpted from the sandstone Arnhem Land Plateau by the Katherine River. Nitmiluk also holds many other hidden treasures—pools among groves of palms and paperbarks, deep precipitous gorges and tumbling waterfalls. These riches can only be discovered by those walking the little-used Jatbula Trail, which links the Nitmiluk visitor information centre to the pleasantly cool and deep pools beneath Edith Falls.

*The last light turned the gorge walls to a brilliant shade of earthy red, and the spray and froth of the numerous cascades sparkled in the subtle light as we submersed our weary bodies in one of the many pools.*



The wet season transforms the landscape in northern Australia, creating spectacular waterfalls and a palette of vibrant greens. Fortunately, Leah O'Neil, Brendon Douglas and I were undertaking this walk following the late rains of Cyclone Monica, which meant that there was still plenty of water coming down the falls. After arranging a boat with Nitmiluk Tours to avoid the flooded bridge across the Katherine River, we set off through woodlands of eucalyptus and tall grass. It was only a short four kilometre walk along the base of low, sloping cliffs before we came to the first in a series of magnificent, intimate swimming holes. We entered a broad amphitheatre of cliffs, broken only by a narrow ribbon of water, a silky, silver stream that crashed amongst a jumble of rocks before falling into a large pool fringed by green. We stood on the sands that gently sloped into the deep, dark waters, admiring the magic of this seemingly rarely visited spot. There was little hesitation; the lure of a temperate rock pool on a 30°C day is enough to draw even the most aquaphobic person in for a quick dip.

We searched the nearby cliffs for rock art or evidence of previous occupation. Nothing was found, but we were sure this location had



some hidden past, stories written in the landscape that only the Jawoyn people can read and pass on through story, songs and dance from generation to generation.

After lingering late into the day, we forced ourselves out from under the cool shade of the pandanus and fig trees. The track eventually found a spur leading to the top of the plateau. This small rise gave way to different vegetation: flat grasslands interspersed with trees, most notably ironwood, an important tree with many uses for the Jawoyn people. The hard, heavy timber is used for making hunting tools, including boomerangs, clap sticks and nulla-nullas (a wooden club or killing stick). It also has medicinal properties, from drying up a mother's breast milk to soothing sore and aching muscles. The yellow kapok, the

The falls that feed the Northern Rockhole, near the start of the walk. *Inset*, cooling off in the cool, clear waters of the smaller of the two pools at Sandy Camp Pool. *Main picture*, vivid rock art found on a small and rocky outcrop beside the track. All photos by the author



dominant tree of the region, is an extremely useful calendar tree. The Jawoyn people, with their intimate knowledge of the land, recognise five seasons within the year. The prominent flower of the yellow kapok signals cold, dry weather, the 'malapbarr' season. The oval green fruit signals hot, dry weather, 'jungalk' season, and, more importantly, that fresh-

huge fanning palm leaves, we discovered three rock art sites. It's an archive that shows a relationship with a land that is harsh and variable, a picture of gained knowledge of the natural cycle of animals, plants and the use of fire as a tool for the management of the land.

Time slipped past us in the hours of exploration and the hottest time of the day was

Our slow progress to this point now forced us to move on. We made an early start. The cool air was strongly scented with a sweet honey fragrance emanating from melaleucas and woollybutts. The woodlands were active: red-tailed black cockatoos searched for seeds, blue-faced honeyeaters frolicked in the tree tops and lizards scurried away under foot—



Brendon Douglas and Leah O'Neill crossing the broad river above Crystal Falls. Right, Brendon and Leah again, this time paused in magnificent woodland.

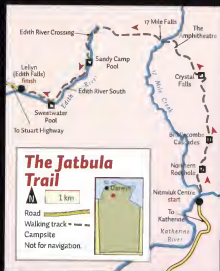
water crocodile eggs are ready to be collected for eating.

The three of us suffered for spending many lazy hours at the Northern Rock Hole, and had to rush against the setting sun to make our campsite by the Biddlecombe Cascades. We had just enough time to dump our packs and run down to view the sun dropping below the distant hills through a massive fissure, gouged by the constant thunder of soft water tumbling from the plateau's edge. The last light turned the gorge walls to a brilliant shade of earthy red, and the spray and froth of the numerous cascades sparkled in the subtle light as we submersed our weary bodies in one of the many pools.

The flat, open country made for easy walking, as the track weaved between thousands of dirt spires made by mound-building termites. We were fortunate to be walking early in the season when the wildflowers were at their best. Sometimes the track faded completely, where new growth had reclaimed and obscured the path, making navigation difficult on the open, featureless plateau. Occasionally the track entered a grove of large, spreading paperbarks, figs and palms, fringing a seasonal stream that filled small waterholes. Near one of these tiny oases, a small rocky outcrop stood above the landscape, an ideal seasonal shelter from the elements for ancestors of the Jawoyn. Hidden amongst the jumble of rocks and protected from view by

bearing down. We moved hastily across the shimmering, rocky plateau towards what was a heavy blue line on the map fringed by thick, dense green, the sign of a welcome dip and lunch in cool, deep shade. Crystal Falls was aptly named; a broad, clear stream flowed gently through deep pools and interwoven channels before thunderously spilling over the plateau edge to disappear into a deep, narrow gorge. Not wanting to drag ourselves from this haven, a refuge from the hot surroundings, we lingered in the dark shadows of the massive paperbarks, occasionally submersing ourselves in the cool water, settling down for another short day's walking and an early camp.

Collecting water from the stream, Leah noticed a small lone yellow kapok clinging precariously to the rock bank just above the roar of the falls. Hanging from the leafless tree's only branch was a flying fox resting from the heat of the day—completely enclosed in its cape-like wings. With the falls deadening our footsteps, we were able to gain a very close view of this interesting animal. Resting during the day, usually in sociable flocks amongst tree canopies, the bats are most active at night, when they feed using sight and an acute sense of smell to locate eucalyptus flowers and fruit. These bats play an important role in our ecology, vital for the regeneration of our native forests, spreading the pollen and fruits of over a hundred different species, and helping to maintain the diversity of our forests.



all making the most of the cool hours. The three of us were surprised by an equally startled and agile wallaby. These shy animals were an important food source for the Jawoyn people. Traditionally hunted using spears, the meat was cooked over coals in ground-ovens, while the skin was made into water bags, sewn together with twine and sealed with native beeswax.

By late morning we arrived, footsore and weary, in the Amphitheatre. This concealed, hairpin-shaped escarpment fell directly below us, camouflaged by the spreading crowns of eucalyptus and melaleuca trees. The three of us would have missed it if we hadn't rested on



a lawn—well-maintained by marsupials—to study our progress on the map. A faint pad followed the cliff's top to a steel staircase where a large oenolia tree grew, easily recognised by its cluster of pinnate leaves and the globular fruits dangling from its branches. Although the Jawoyn people consider the golf ball sized fruits inedible, they have developed a way of obtaining food with this tree. When pulverised between two rocks and placed in a small billabong, the bark becomes a fish poison. Fish float unconscious to the water's surface, making collection easy. Descending the staircase, we entered a unique microclimate. The cool and moist cavity was an oasis. During the heat of the day a myriad of wildlife takes advantage of this refuge. Many birds feed in the trees' canopies, and the rustling pandanus fronds shelter many small animals. At the apex of the arching cliffs the fine sprays of a waterfall glistened, the resulting stream bubbling and racing through its lush surroundings. The most delightful find of this wonderful spot was rock art which we found

views spread out across the valley. The gently sloping, sandy banks were the perfect picnic spot, cool and relaxing. However, the log debris caught in the high branches of the trees showed that this magic place wasn't always so tranquil. Summer rains throughout the wet season turn the placid swirling water into a raging torrent and close the Jatbula Trail.

The track passed through recently burnt areas. Small clusters of vivid green coloured the otherwise black surroundings, the bases of trees were scarred and our shoes blackened by the ash. Fire plays an important role in Jawoyn traditions; it is an important tool for managing the land. Many food plants require regular burning for a continuing high yield and others need fire during their life cycle to survive. Other bush foods live in fire-created tree hollows, and kangaroos and wallabies graze on new growth in newly burnt areas—making them easier to hunt. It was also important for the Jawoyn people to reduce the build-up of dry litter with small, cool fires to lessen the risk of being caught in a wildfire.

of the bogs was an angry water buffalo. An encounter with such a large wild animal reminds you how small and defenceless we are. Fortunately for us, the huge beast only glared at us before fleeing.

The track continued through flood-damaged forest and was often difficult to follow. We weaved between pandanus and fallen logs, eventually arriving at Sandy Camp Pool, arguably the most beautiful pool on the Jatbula Trail. An example of nature in perfect balance, it is fed by clear waters that emerge from a thicket of green before gently tumbling over moss-covered roots to fill two translucent waterholes. A smooth rock weir held back the water of the first pool, which was shallow enough to be heated by the warmth of the sun. It was a pool to lounge in for hours, soaking up the ambience. Spilling over the weir, water filled the larger of the two pools. Shaded by weeping paperbarks, the shallows of the far bank sustained a thick collection of rushes and sedges. Covering the surface were the saucer-like leaves of water lilies, their flowering stems standing up to a foot high and crowned by a ring of mauve petals. The sandy campsite was idyllic; the sandbank was the perfect diving platform from which to plunge into the four metre deep water. The trees that shaded us as we sat on the sandy banks would have undoubtedly shaded the Jawoyn people. The surrounding area had an abundance of food and resources: bark from the paperbark tree had a multitude of uses, from the storage and cooking of foods to the making of shelter and beds, and water lilies are almost completely edible. The waterhole was home to an abundance of fish and the surrounding woodland held a variety of game, seeds and fruits. It was all still there, spread out around us, but only for people who had the knowledge that is gained from a long relationship with the land. We scurried on, passing many other swimming opportunities, until we came to Sweetwater Pool, our last campsite.

The last five kilometres of walking to the base of Edith Falls gave us time to ponder this magnificent country—its harsh but hospitable nature, its ability to provide for the people and animals that live in it. In return, the Jawoyn have cared for and managed the land for tens of thousands of years. They continue to maintain a strong relationship with the land, one of mutual responsibility—'care for the land and it will care for you'. The caretaking responsibilities are many and varied, from performing life-giving song and dance, passing on knowledge to the young, to the proper burning of the land. It is a delicately balanced relationship and has created a rich culture over thousands of years that non-Indigenous people struggle to understand.

To walk the Jatbula Trail is not only a pleasurable wilderness experience, it provides a small insight into a fascinating culture for those willing to inquire and absorb.

Andrew Davison has clear memories of climbing Mount Olsen Bagge when he was seven, planting the seed for a life devoted to walking. This passion has taken him to far-flung corners of the globe, from the high mountains of Central Asia to the arid expanses of the Sahara desert. However, it is the remote trackless areas of the Australian wilderness that he enjoys most.



on the surrounding escarpment. Red ochre figures were still clear on the very sheltered parts of the wall, evidence that the Jawoyn people frequented this country in search of shelter and food. Along the base of the cliff, rock figs clung to the smooth wall, their canopy inching toward the sun and their web-like roots searching for water in cracks. The hard, unripe fruits cheated us of a free feed and their location gave cause for thought: 'Maybe they germinated from seeds discarded by the artist?'

We felt some urgency to keep moving. Kilometres needed to be covered and the clock continued to tick. We continued across the plateau, sometimes nearing its edge, the sparse vegetation allowing excellent views across the broad valley of Seventeen Mile Creek. The folds of distant lands caught the hard light of the mid-afternoon sun, the view of a kind of beauty that is hard to capture with a camera.

Another invigorating plunge, this time in the pools of Seventeen Mile Creek, accompanied lunch. Perched above the falls on the plateau's edge, the water tumbled over smooth rocks, bubbling and foaming to create a spa. From within this natural Jacuzzi, spectacular

The early months of 'the dry' are the best time to be burning. Moist bogs and gullies create a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas, leaving valuable habitats. The blackened landscape was only broken by the occasional lush bog and stream and stayed with us all the way to the headwaters of the Edith River, our camp for the evening.

The morning was moist with dew. Having covered the hard yards the day before, we had time to linger over cups of tea, as the sun slowly rose and dried our damp belongings. The dead-looking surroundings were certainly alive; the raucous cries of little corellas were heard in the distance, flocks of finches actively searched for favoured grass seeds, while whistling kites glided above, searching for small lizards.

The track followed the line of the river, crossing flood plains and waterlogged bogs, through dry, head-high grass and across trickling tributaries. The soft, soggy hollows were obviously popular with herds of wild pigs. Unfortunately, large tracts looked as though an industrial plough had prepared the area for a cash crop. Taking full advantage of one

# Macquarie Island

Brett Free documents some of the unique wildlife and history of this incredible island



Southern elephant seal cows rest on an east-coast beach. Elephant seals usually gather together and lie close to each other. They favour the more sheltered east coast, preferring sandy beaches and flat areas, covered in tussock grass, behind beaches to the windswept, rocky beaches of the west coast.

Male elephant seals develop bulbous noses on maturing to adulthood and use them to great effect during the breeding season. They snort and roar at other males during repeated dominant and defensive posturing, which they use to protect a harem of cows from other bulls. The resonant bellow of a 'beachmaster'—the dominant bull—as he rises above an opponent is not easily forgotten. This adult male has recently come ashore and is resting before the breeding season begins. Scarring from previous fighting can be seen around the bull's neck. In the background is the Brothers Point Hut, which is used as a field base for scientific study.





Royal penguins—listed as a vulnerable species—are endemic to Macquarie Island and little is known about their activities or behaviour during the time they spend at sea. They return to the island in mid-September and construct nests of stones, in which they lay eggs one month after arrival. Chicks fledge in late January, and all birds return to the ocean by late April. The largest colony is at Hurd Point, where up to 500 000 breeding pairs congregate.

Lusitania Bay is the site of the largest king penguin colony on Macquarie Island, which completely surrounds the rusting remains of the digesters once used to slaughter up to 4000 penguins a day. A colony of this size can be heard long before it is seen when approaching it on foot. Once there, the smell is overwhelming.

The sight of so many penguins is a complete visual overload, and the experience of sitting in the tussock grass above this colony remains one of the highlights of my time on the island. The colony is vulnerable to landslips from rabbit-damaged coastal slopes, and in the winter of 2006 several hundred penguins here were buried in a large landslide. A program to eradicate the rabbits and rodents from Macquarie Island is due to start in 2010.





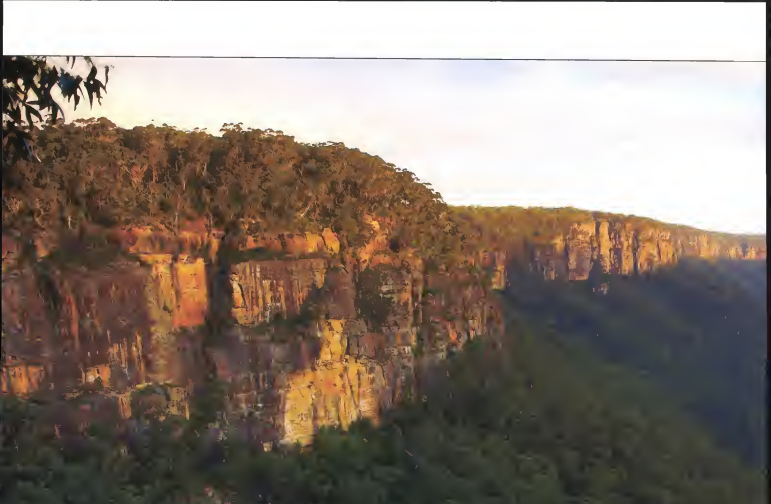


Royal penguins make their way upstream to higher colonies from a beach at the Nuggets, having just arrived at the island after several months feeding at sea. They proceed along the creek bed either by walking or by hopping from rock to rock, often using their beaks to grasp on to rocks as they climb up steeper sections. As always at Macquarie Island, there is safety in numbers. Groups of penguins often move along under the watchful gaze of giant petrels or skuas, which are hungry after surviving winter on the island.



Decaying relics recall an era when southern elephant seals and king and royal penguins were rendered down for oil to use in lamps or as saddle oil. Populations were decimated by the practice. The endemic royal penguin was said to produce the world's brightest and cleanest burning lamp oil. Legend has it that curious penguins would walk up ramps to the digesters in their thousands to meet their end. Remnants of several digester sites can be found on the east coast of Macquarie Island.

Brett Free wintered on Macquarie Island as an Australian Antarctic Division expedition member in 2006 after a summer in Antarctica. His photographs of royal penguins were used for the 2007 Australian Antarctic Territory royal penguins stamps, which were issued as part of the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) Conservation Stamp Collection.



# Kangaroo *a Hidden Gem*

**Tony Rabbitte uncovers the mysteries of this beautiful area  
in New South Wales**

BELIEVED TO BE ONE OF ONLY SEVEN COMPLETELY ENCLOSED VALLEYS in the world, Kangaroo Valley is renowned for its breathtaking vistas, sleepy village atmosphere, intimate weekend retreats and, of course, those famous big cat sightings. For the vast majority of visitors to this remarkable area, their experience serves up little more than the tip of the iceberg. Beyond the village lies a myriad of short bushwalks rich in history, unsurpassed views and tranquil swimming holes.

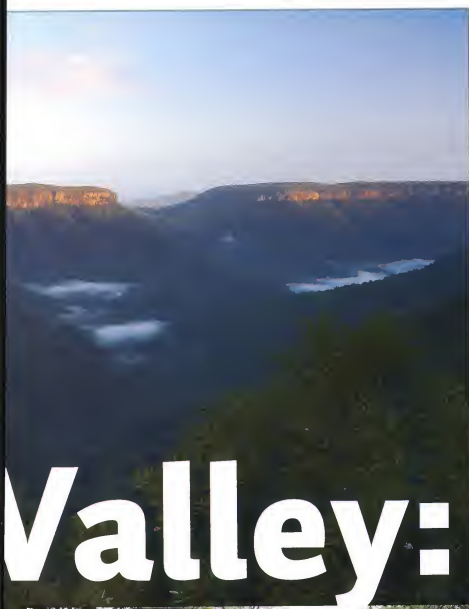
The network of bushwalking tracks in the Kangaroo Valley area and the surrounding region is well suited to either walking groups or the solo bushwalker looking for a few days of solitude. The tracks range from well-maintained fire tracks requiring minimal navigational skills to routes which need a solid working knowledge of map and compass.

## **History**

Long before European settlement, Kangaroo Valley (which was originally called Kangaroo Ground) was occupied by the Wori Wori people.

An 1826 census indicated that there were 79 Aboriginal tribes living in the area. A botanist by the name of James Backhouse is reported to have met with a gathering of Aborigines in 1836 and said that several of them spoke tolerable English. White settlement commenced in the valley around 1860 and by 1890 the Wori Wori had been driven from their traditional grounds and sacred sites, ending 20 000 years of Aboriginal settlement. Aboriginal tribes were known to have regarded the Kangaroo Valley region as an important hunting ground due to its rich and diverse array of fauna. One of the walks described later will take you to two ancient sites where deep grooves for sharpening axes and knives are clearly visible in the rock, signifying the importance of this area as a hunting ground for these original inhabitants.

In 1818 Governor Macquarie commissioned explorer Charles Throsby to find a route from Moss Vale in the Southern Highlands to Jervis Bay on the South Coast of New South Wales. Throsby's diary recorded that he and his team were met at Bundanoon Creek by two Aborigines



who were previously known to Throsby. One of these Aborigines, called 'Timealong'—a large, robust individual with a long beard—is recorded as having assisted Throsby to find a way into Kangaroo Valley. Their route was by an Aboriginal track that eventually became known as Meryla Pass. This pass was later to form part of the main access road between the Southern Highlands and the South Coast. The lower section of Meryla Pass is also known as the Timealong Trail. When you do the Meryla Pass and Timealong Trail walk, you will be travelling along what was once an ancient Aboriginal route.

### Access

The Kangaroo Valley area is located about two and a half hours' drive south of Sydney. Escape Sydney by either of the main freeways, the M5 or the M7, both of which join the Hume Highway. Follow the Hume for a little over an hour to the Southern Highlands, then take the Mittagong/Bowral/Moss Vale exit (79) through to Bowral. At the west end of Bowral turn left at the fourth roundabout eventually to follow the Kangaloon/Sheepwash Road. The road sign here reads Robertson/Wollongong/Nowra (80). From here the route is well signposted to Fitzroy Falls and Kangaroo Valley.

### Flora and fauna

Morton National Park is home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. Mammals include the tiger quoll, pigmy possum, mountain possum, long-nosed potoroo, platypus and dingo. Reptiles in-



**Main picture,** Yarrunga Valley as seen from Fitzroy Falls.

**Inset,** striding down Griffins Fire Trail.

*All photos by the author*

clude the three-lined snake, lace monitor, eastern long-necked turtle, blind snake and bandy bandy, to name just a few species.

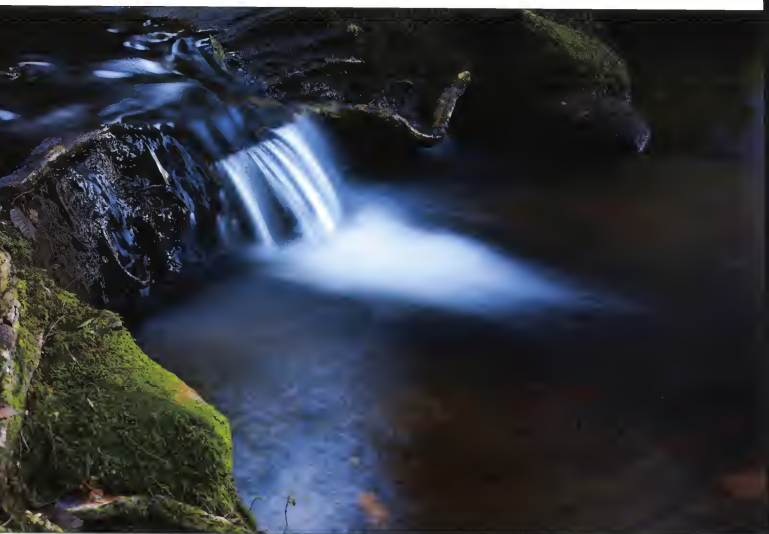
As one would expect of a mountainous area such as this, it supports a wide cross-section of plant species. Cool, sheltered gullies support black wattle, king fern, soft tree-fern, rough tree-fern and sassafras. Climb out of the gullies, and

learn for the majority of experienced bushwalkers. However, there are a multitude of side tracks and less well-known alternatives that you might find yourself being tempted to visit. If you've got the maps on hand you'll be free to explore.

Topographic maps that cover these walks are the Kangaroo Valley, Berry, Burdanoon and Burrier Department of Lands 1:25 000 sheets.

is also quite central to the majority of the walks. Similar facilities are available at Tallowa Dam, where electric barbecues are available, but this is further from town.

For those looking for the full bush camping experience there are various campsites throughout the region, including Beehive Point, where cars can be parked at the campsite and water is



lush vegetation gives way to dry eucalypt forest where only the hardier plants, such as banksias, tea trees, hakeas and honey flowers, survive.

### **Weather**

Visitors to Kangaroo Valley and the surrounding region should be aware that this is typically mountainous terrain and the weather here can change quickly and without warning. The area is renowned for high rainfall, storms, wind, mist, thick fog and floods, and in winter snow is not unheard of on the escarpment. Remember also that a typical walk can take you into varying levels of altitude up to about 750 metres. At any time of the year, walkers should carry suitable wet-weather clothing along with a warm jumper or jacket.

### **Navigation, maps and further reading**

For the majority of the walks outlined here topographic maps are not really necessary. Most of the walks are well marked or on well-maintained fire tracks, and navigation shouldn't be a prob-

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service publishes a walks guide called *Kangaroo Valley & Adjacent National Parks* which outlines some of the more popular walks in the Kangaroo Valley and surrounding areas. This book is available from the Fitzroy Falls visitors' centre, but detailed track notes for these walks are also available free of charge at [www.treksandclimbs.com](http://www.treksandclimbs.com) under the 'track notes' section.

### **Water, campsites and facilities**

Many excellent campsites can be found amongst this network of tracks, but the most convenient way to visit this area is to set up a base camp and venture out on day trips from there.

The Bendeela Picnic Area is well suited as a base camp for exploring the Kangaroo Valley region. Toilet facilities are available along with picnic tables, although campfires and charcoal barbecues are not permitted at any time. Gas stoves are permitted except during total fire bans. The Bendeela Picnic Area is only about seven kilometres from the Kangaroo Valley village centre where supplies are readily available and

available from Lake Yarrunga. Another suitable site for this purpose is near the start of the Grif-fins Fire Trail at Jacks Corner. Perhaps the main drawback of this site is the fact that there are a lot of trees here, with the risk of falling branches. Also, water is not available at this site. On the upside, it is a mere hundred metres or so from the car park, making it possible to carry in water and heavy base camp equipment. Venturing out requires little more than a properly stocked day pack and a pair of walking boots.

Although water is usually available on some of the walks in this region, you should always carry ample water with you, especially during the warmer summer months.

### **An overview of the walks**

The majority of these walks are in and around Morton National Park and most are within close driving distance of one another. An exception to the rule is the Barren Grounds Nature Reserve, which requires driving back through Robertson and then taking the Jamberoo Road towards Jamberoo.



## Lower Yarrunga Creek area: Griffins Fire Trail, Meryla Pass and Timealong Trail

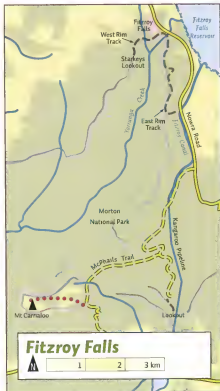
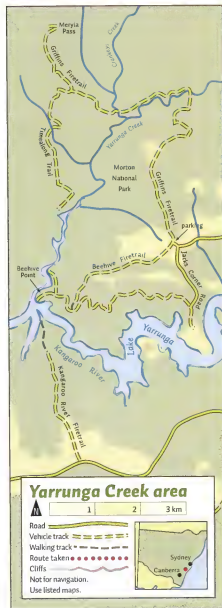
Totalling 22 kilometres return, Griffins Fire Trail—Meryla Pass is one of the longest, and arguably the most demanding, of the day walks in the Kangaroo Valley area. It is demanding not be-

cause of the difficulty of the terrain—it follows a well-maintained fire track—but because approximately 40 per cent of the walking is uphill, including a steep section in the second half of your return journey.

The walk starts at Jacks Corner, on top of a plateau, then drops to the valley floor, where the track crosses Yarrunga Creek by a series of

top of the escarpment, but not before passing a clearing known as Gales Flat. It was here that Arthur Yates, founder of Yates Seeds, once grazed cattle, and ruins of a hut from that time still remain.

Turning left at the aforementioned intersection will take you down the section of the track known as Timealong Trail in honour of the Ab-



From far left to right, one of the many sublime water holes encountered in the valley. Aboriginal axe sharpening grooves in the rock of Brown Mountain. The view across Lake Yarrunga from Beehive Point.

original man who guided explorer Charles Throsby through this section of wilderness in 1818. Timealong Trail leads down to Lake Yarrunga, where it disappears below the waterline and re-emerges somewhere on the opposite bank. The lake as it exists today is the result of the construction of the Tallawarra Dam. Timealong Trail bears evidence of the construction in 1896 of a road that was never finished. Rock build-ups on the lower side of the track are still where they were originally placed by hand back in the early pioneer days.

## Kangaroo River Fire Trail

Along with several other walks in the Kangaroo Valley region, this one offers an opportunity to go swimming. With a round-trip distance of only 11 kilometres, this is a good walk to do early in the morning or later in the day. The Kangaroo River Fire Trail leads directly to Lake Yarrunga, the source of the Shoalhaven's water supply, which doubles as a tranquil swimming spot.

## Mt Carrialoo and Pipeline Lookout

This is an interesting and rewarding walk for those bushwalkers with experience in finding their way through open bushland.

The walk begins by following a well-used service road which starts not far from the Fitzroy Falls visitors' centre, and it eventually ends up as a trackless route across the summit plateau of Mt Carrialoo. As on most of the walks, evidence of local history is apparent as the approach route passes by a clearing where McPhail's Farm once stood. A kilometre further on, a faint track can be seen leaving the main route. Follow this track along a ridgeline to the base of the cliffs, which lead to the Mt Carrialoo summit plateau. A fallen tree once aided walkers in their ascent

stepping stones. From here, a kilometre or so of easy walking passes through the site where the Griffins Farm, an important part of the local history, once stood. The remains of a stone wall are still visible along the track near where the farm's entrance once was. A short walk beyond the farm brings you to the causeway which now spans Crankeys Creek—yet another beautiful spot. From here the track makes a steep upward climb to the top of the escarpment, which marks the opposite side of the Yarrunga Valley.

About halfway along this section of the track an intersection is encountered which marks the western end of the Griffins Fire Trail. Turning right will take you on to Meryla Pass and to the

to the top of the cliffs but has since slid down the hill somewhat. It has now been replaced by a permanent rope, providing an easy scramble for the energetic walker.

Once on top of Mt Carrialloo, the walk through the open bushland should only be negotiated by experienced bushwalkers since tracks are not present and navigation skills are required.



A hairpin banksia. **Right**, tree detail.



The views from the Mt Carrialloo plateau are spectacular and are considered by many to be some of the best views in the region. Some large and interesting rock formations can be found on the summit plateau itself.

The Pipeline Lookout walk is a variation on the Mt Carrialloo approach. Again, as on many of these walks, the views are spectacular.

### Fitzroy Falls area East and West Rim Tracks

Although both of these walks cater more to 'tourists' than to the serious bushwalker, they are none the less well worth a visit, even if just for the photo opportunities. Of these two walks, the recently re-opened East Rim Track is the more interesting. Sensational photographs can be obtained along this track at various points if the conditions are right. The best time to visit the East Rim Track is in spring when the wildflower display along the full length of the walk is amazing. This walk will hold more significance for you than for many of those who frequent it because the far end offers terrific views of the Yarrunga Valley and Mt Carrialloo areas, where you will most likely have walked over the preceding days.

### Barren Grounds Nature Reserve

This 20 square kilometre reserve is a good example of a 'hanging swamp plateau' and is mostly surrounded by sheer cliffs. The reserve, which consists mostly of sedge and heathlands and relatively few trees, was established in 1956 to preserve the natural habitat of the rare ground parrot and the eastern bristle bird. The Barren Grounds Nature Reserve is at an altitude of approximately 600 metres and is a favourite haunt for local birdwatchers. It plays host to more than 160 species of birds, some of which are rare or endangered. For those with an interest in birdlife, forgetting the binoculars on this walk

would be heartbreaking. Despite this reserve's unfortunate name, it is actually far from barren.

Visiting the Barren Grounds plateau after heavy rain can make for unpleasant walking as long stretches of the track system can become almost impassable bog holes. Even in dry conditions, sections of some of the tracks feel spongy underfoot.



### Red Rocks Nature Reserve/ Browns Mountain

This walk is famous for its fine examples of Aboriginal axe-sharpening grooves. Together, these sites are said to be one of the best examples of Aboriginal sharpening grooves left in Australia. When visiting these sites, please show more



respect for this area's original occupiers than our ancestors did. These sites are sacred to the descendants of the Wori Wori people and we are privileged to be able to visit them.

This walk also offers unsurpassed views over Kangaroo Valley from yet another angle along with breathtaking views of the far south coast.

### Other walks

There are many more short walks in the Kangaroo Valley and surrounding areas—far more than can be outlined here. These include Belmore and Carrington Falls near the village of Robertson, Drawing Room Rocks, Beehive Point, Geringong Falls near Barren Grounds and the Four Views track system near Tallawarra Dam, to name a few. There is also a selection of short, interesting and mostly historically based walks in the Bundanoon region. All are within easy access and, when combined, are sure to add up to a memorable week's exploring. Many of these can be combined to form overnight walks.

Tony Rabbitt is a professional photographer specialising in motorbiking, but his real passion is for venturing into remote wilderness areas. Like many solo walkers, the Budawangans are a favourite haunt. Tony has climbed several Himalayan peaks and completed a Technical Mountaineering Course in New Zealand.



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# Mt Anne Circuit

Bron Willis outlines a spectacular walking circuit in Tasmania's South-west



THE LEAVES OF THE PANDANUS PLANT CURL INTO DELIGHTFUL SPIRALS, cushion plants exude a lush green hue and the tiny, colourful alpine flowers at your feet remind you of an atlas. Lake Judd stretches out in the depths of a valley nearby. Behind you, Lake Pedder's sky blue water glistens, a gentle reminder of a battle that was lost and a war that still wages not too far away.

This is the Southwest National Park, and ahead of you stand the cliffs of Mt Anne. It is the highest peak in the park and offers a considerable challenge. The three- to four-day Mt Anne circuit provides walkers with a wonderful overview of the area from a range of angles; by the time the circuit is complete, walkers have seen the many faces of Mt Anne, Lake Judd, Lots Wife and Lake Pedder as well as countless unnamed tarns whose beauty adds a mystical quality to the surrounding valleys.

## When to go

A clear view from Mt Anne is—unsurprisingly—most likely in summer, although even then there may be storms and even snow. Experienced walkers do complete the circuit in autumn and spring, but few venture this way during the often snowy months of winter. Walkers should be prepared for severe weather at any time of the year and should be ready to change plans if the weather turns.

## Safety/warnings

This circuit is a challenging one and requires a reasonable level of fitness. Although the track is mostly easy to follow, there are two parts of the route that can be tricky to navigate: the side trip to the summit of Mt Anne, and the traverse of 'the Notch' en route to Mt Lot. These

sections require much scrambling and some basic rockclimbing. The fact that Mt Anne is a side trip makes summiting easier, but negotiating the Notch with a full pack on your back can be dicey. Although some track notes merely suggest that a climbing rope may be useful to haul your pack in places, negotiating the Notch without one could be dangerous in bad weather.

You'll also need a sturdy tent and three- to four-season sleeping bag, especially if you plan to camp at Shelf Camp, which is exposed to strong winds.

## Maps

Tasmap publishes the 1:25 000 topographical maps *Anne* and *Scotts*. Some walkers may decide to forgo the latter, as *Anne* covers all but the last seven kilometres or so of the walk, and the track in this section is easily followed.

## Further reading

The Mt Anne circuit is covered in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* and John Chapman's *South West Tasmania*.

## Permits

Walkers are required to carry a permit to walk in the Southwest National Park. Holiday passes last eight weeks and cost \$30 for one person without a car, or \$50 for a vehicle, including all its passengers. You can buy these at the Parks & Wildlife Service office just outside Maydena (phone [03] 6288 1149). If you know you'll be passing through out of hours, the staff there may be willing to help organise your permit over the phone.





### Access

This walk is difficult to access using public transport. Tassielink (phone 1300 300 520) runs a minibus service from late November to late March from Hobart to Scotts Peak Road, dropping walkers off at the start of the walk for \$69 each way. The service only runs on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

A better option is to drive and leave your car at Condominium Creek on Scotts Peak Road. The walk finishes at Red Tape Creek, roughly nine kilometres further down Scotts Peak Road. This is a long, tedious way to end an otherwise exhilarating walk; if you can organise a car shuttle, do so. This is a quiet road outside holi-



## The walk at a glance

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Grade          | Moderate to difficult   |
| Length         | Three to four days  |
| Type           | Mountain scenery, spectacular views of lakes and tarns  |
| Region         | Tasmania's Southwest National Park  |
| Nearest towns  | Maydena   |
| Start, finish  | Condominium Creek, Red Tape Creek (both on Scotts Peak Road)  |
| Maps           | Anne and Scotts Tasmap 1:25 000 topographic maps  |
| Best time      | Summer  |
| Special points | Take a rope for hauling packs and be prepared for some basic rockclimbing at the summit of Mt Anne and while traversing the Notch |

From far left to right, the south side of Mt Anne as seen from the Eliza Plateau. *Grant Dixon.* The author at Shelf Camp with Mt Anne watching over in the background. All uncredited photos Terry Willis. A mist bow over Judds Charm (officially known by the more prosaic name of Spanner Lake) in the Lonely Tarns region. *Dixon.* A detail of the endemic pandini.



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day periods, so you may not always be able to thumb a lift.

### The walk

Head out east from Condominium Creek, along the boardwalk and through the button grass. Begin the ascent through low scrub, remembering occasionally to turn around and enjoy the views of Lake Pedder, which get more spectacular as you ascend. Continue past the first saddle and along the open ridge towards High Camp Hut. On a warm day you'll quickly find yourself sweating, as you gain 700 metres over the first three kilometres.

Just after the beginning of the tree line you'll come across the short side track to High Camp Hut. Take this and find a small but welcoming hut, water tank and toilet. If you took the minibus you'll probably want to stop here for the night unless you arrived early, in good weather and with plenty of daylight hours.

If you made an early start and you're aiming for Shelf Camp, push on up to Mt Eliza, where you'll enjoy your first view of Mt Anne's reddish-brown dolerite cliffs. The best lunch spot is further on, past the open plateau, where the intriguing vegetation will bring out the botanist in you. Lake Judd and other mountain tarns come into view and you'll no doubt be drawn to drop your pack and deviate for a better view. Views such as these are one reason people fall in love with walking.

Continue along the track, which veers north towards the end of the plateau. Soon you'll come to a boulderfield, where the walking becomes tricky and tiring. Carry on to the west of the peak until you meet the track junction. This is the time to make a decision about whether to summit Mt Anne. If the sky is clear and you still have two hours of light, drop your packs here and take the side trip to Mt Anne. The peak is a magnet for bad weather and the route to the summit is tricky at the best of times. If you've had enough for the day or you want to wait for better weather the next day, take the turn-off to the east towards Shelf Camp, at least another half an hour's walk away.

### Side trip to Mt Anne summit

From the track junction, head north, following cairns along the ridge to the saddle below Mt Anne. Climb up the rocky gully, carefully following the cairns. As you near the bottom of a steep rock face, the route traverses terraces to the left and then goes directly up for about two or three metres. It is easy to take the wrong route here, but if you look carefully for the cairns, you'll eventually find the way. After the short climb, traverse rightwards across more ledges, edging your way over steep boulders and up and over the ridge, ascending to the summit. Enjoy views west to Lake Pedder and south-east to the magical Lonely Tarns and Lots Wife, which—from this angle—looks like a thin, circular column of rock jutting up from the landscape. Once you've had your fill, return to the packs, taking care on the tricky descent.

### Mt Anne turn-off to Shelf Camp

Collect your packs and take the turn-off to the east of the plateau. The track descends from the ridge and goes along the terraces facing Mt Anne. Traverse these for a good half an hour until you get to the large rocky slabs of Shelf Camp. This

camp, adjacent to the dolerite columns of Mt Anne's south-east face, is extremely exposed, and thus particularly spectacular. Mt Anne, drenched in a sunset's golden hues, provides a perfect distraction for the designated dinner chef; however, this camp is not recommended in poor weather. You may get lucky with a still evening, but if the gusts of wind common to this area come in during the night, your sleep will not be restful! The noise of the wind hurtling through the valley towards you is enough to make the most unshakable outdoors enthusiast a little edgy. Pitch your tent diligently, otherwise you could have a very restless night.

### Day two

Pick up the cairns and follow the route east along the terraces. Negotiating the large boulders is tiring as you navigate the rocky ridge towards Mt Lot. As you round the crest of the ridge, Lake Judd comes into view once more, as does the impossible-looking Lightning Ridge. Follow the cairns until they take you up and over to the northern side of an unnamed peak just before Mt Lot. You'll begin to descend and will soon approach the Notch, the most challenging section of the circuit. This can be extremely nerve-racking; the Notch is obviously the place for all weather to come pummeling through from one side of the mountain to the other, producing a high-pitched whistling sound. As you approach on the northern side, you'll need your rope to lower your packs from a ledge to the ground below. Carefully edge your way over the ledge yourself and collect your pack.

You are now standing in the V of the Notch and must hoist yourself up the rock in front of you, leaving your pack behind, but taking the rope with you. This basic rockclimbing can be off-putting. Use footholds on the right and the corner on the left to hoist yourself up and move your weight over the ledge. Once you have mounted the ledge, there's a makeshift anchor that someone has fashioned out of rope and sling. If you trust this enough you can use it to anchor yourself while you throw down the rope and your companion ties on the packs, ready for you to haul up. Once you're over the ledge you can relax a little in the knowledge that, although your day is far from over, the worst is behind you.

Continue following the cairns, traversing the south-west knoll towards Mt Lot. Once you round the summit, views of Lake Picone and the Lonely Tarns, often haunted by hanging mist, are revealed. The route swings south after Mt Lot as you descend Lightning Ridge. Picking your way around the boulders is strenuous work; the descent is steep and hard on the knees.

Once you leave Lightning Ridge, enter the damp and mossy forest below. After fighting the twisting tree limbs encroaching your path, descend steadily towards the open scrub on the banks of Lake Picone. The track leads you along a slight rise between Lake Picone and the Lonely Tarns. Lots Wife, to your east, is no longer a thin column of rock as you view its south face. There are many good campsites, but the most pleasant is worth the extra ten minutes' walk down the bank at the farthest end, where a creek runs between Lake Picone and the Lonely Tarns. In summer, Lake Picone is a magical and literally breathtaking place to swim: the water is crystal clear, but icy. A plaque on a small boulder nearby remembers

Joe Picone; if he kept watch over this lovely but lonely campsite the night we were there, he did so silently and contentedly.

### Day three

Head back uphill to the junction where the track heads south, then swings west in between the larger two of the Lonely Tarns. You soon leave the lakes behind and enter low scrub, beginning to climb. As you round a knoll and pick up cairns once more, look behind you and admire yesterday's route down Lightning Ridge. Pass another small tarn on your right and walk through open, flat marshland towards the gentle slopes of Mt Sarah Jane.

Continue to the south, up and across a ridge, where the track swings south-west down the steady slope of Mt Sarah Jane, through forest and towards the southern end of Lake Judd. The track opens out into boggy button-grass plains, crossing streams and creeks and, finally, Anne River flowing from Lake Judd. You will soon meet the noticeably better maintained Lake Judd Track. This leaves the river, crossing many



The author atop Mt Eliza with Lake Pedder in the background.

tributaries, before finally crossing it again by a bridge.

If you're walking out to a waiting car, walk the last two kilometres to Red Tape Creek. If you're catching the bus, or have planned for another night out, this is the place to stop. The campsite is a disappointment after the stunning locations of the previous nights, but after a long day you may be glad of a flat, sheltered spot to crawl into your sleeping bag. Be warned, the mosquitoes here are so many and monstrous that you may be tempted to eat your dinner sitting astride the cable bridge over the river; it's the only place they won't follow, so long as there is a light breeze.

### Day four

Cross the cable bridge and walk the remaining two kilometres out to Red Tape Creek and Scotts Peak Road. Turn right and walk the tedious nine kilometres back to your car, or if you still believe in hitchhiking and the charity of friendly Tasmanian folk, do it the easy way; stick your thumb out and try not to stink out the car. 🐾

Brian Willis is a Melbourne writer and editor who loves combining her two passions: words and the outdoors. She recommends the occasional splash in an icy cold Tasmanian tarn to clear the cobwebs out.

# Mt Burrowa: *an alpine outlier*

Stephen Curtain explores this little known national park which gives a supreme vista of the Australian Alps across two states



ON FIRST APPROACH, THE PEAKS OF BURROWA-PINE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL Park are truly a sight to be seen. A series of tooth-like bluffs, most pipping 1000 metres in altitude, dominate the skyline. Above these, a subalpine plateau obscures the summit of Mt Burrowa at 1300 metres. Despite its modest height, it is a bushwalk with bite. This overnight circuit walk entails careful passage along ridgetops strewn with loose, unstable rock—add a little rain and the walking becomes greasy. The track itself is reasonably well marked with rock cairns and track markers, but becomes indiscernible in some sections. In combination, these factors mean that great distances aren't covered in a hurry. However, on Mt Burrowa itself, as you emerge from the tunnel of snow gums and step on to wonderful slabs of rhyolite, you'll immediately understand why it's worth the effort. In late spring, the western faces of the Main Range in Kosciuszko National Park shimmer across the Murray River in New South Wales. A myriad of snowdrifts litters the range's upper slopes. In an equally breathtaking spectacle to the south, the eastern flanks of Mt Bogong are adorned with thick ribs of white. If calm weather prevails and your tent stands without the need for pegs, a night spent on the summit's slabs would be memorable.

## When to go

Early spring offers the combination of outstanding summit views and an assured supply of water in nearby creeks. However, if ferrying large quantities of water is your thing, summer and autumn would also suit. It is a good idea to phone the Parks Victoria office in Tallangatta on (02) 6071 5301 to check water availability.

## Further information

Download the Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park notes by Parks Victoria from [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au). This contains a map showing the entire walking route, which is not marked on the required 1:25 000 Guys Forest and Pine Mountain Vicmap sheets.

## Access

Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park is roughly 120 kilometres east of Albury-Wodonga. From the Hume Highway, drive east along the Murray Valley Highway past Tallangatta and Koetong townships to meet the Cudgewa-Tintaldra Road. Turn left (north) here and drive another 16 kilometres until you reach the Cudgewa North Road. Turn left and travel for about eight kilometres. At GR 692067, an obvious sign declares the entrance to the national park. It's only another 800 metres south along Hincines Creek Track, although this is marked as Dogman Track on the Pine Mountain Vicmap. Park the vehicle at the campsite, which has a toilet as well as a fireplace. Fresh water is only a minute's walk away at Hincines Creek. Consider leaving a second car or even a bike at the end of the walk if the final road-bash does not appeal. To reach it, continue north along Cudgewa Bluff Road for about three kilometres until you reach a signposted turn-off, 'The Ridge Track', on your left. Turn and drive to the end of the road where further signage indicates the start of a walking track.

## The walk

An earlyish start is recommended—say 8 or 9 am. You'll only need to carry about a litre of water at this stage as Hincines Creek is followed for some distance. From the campsite, ford the creek and walk south along Hincines Creek Track before reaching its junction with Dogman Track. Turn right (west) and continue to Hincines Clearing (signposted) and a nearby intentions book. The vehicle track slowly winds its way up through pleasant eucalypt forest and at one point through magnificent stands of blanket leaf, easily identified by soft, furry hair on the leaves' undersides. Hincines Saddle at around 1000 metres is the natural choice for a good rest. With a moderately relaxed pace, you'll be there in about three hours. However, before you leave Hincines Creek (about 600 metres before the saddle), collect enough water for that night's camp and some of the next day's walk. If it is warm, take extra. The next reliable water source is about eight kilometres away.

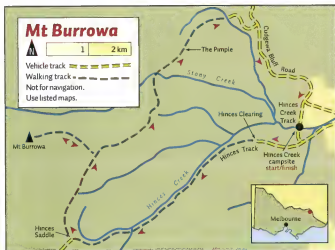


From Hincas Saddle, be prepared to take your time. A faint foot-pad is hard to follow, sidling mostly along the western side of the spur. Orange, triangular track markers are helpful but otherwise keep to the highest ground. The crest of the ridge is only 40–50 minutes' walking away and, once there, the walking is distinctly more methodical over a bed of unstable rocks. This style of walking sets the tone for the remainder of the trip. However, far from being a hindrance, time seems to slow a little and you begin to absorb the bush's sights and smells. If you proceed quietly, you may be rewarded with the enchanting calls of the superb lyrebird.

Flat, clear and sort campsites are rare along this ridge. If you haven't tried it, erecting your tent on a rock slab is the natural, and fun, alternative. No need to shake the soil from your tent pegs in the morning! There is an excellent flat slab with good views at GR 636044. However, if time permits and you're willing, Mt Burrows's summit ridge and its more extensive slabs require about another two-and-a-half hours' walk. Continue north-east.

and terraces and on to a steep spur. Be careful. Even a little surface moisture or loose lichen can send you tripping. If you can't down-climb, the bum-slide is just as effective. From the 1000 metre contour, the going is steep but spectacular. Across the creek valley, the 500 metre steep face of the Pimple imposes a vertical gash across the horizon line. Stony Creek provides welcome respite, a dose of moist greenery and two very rough tent sites.

The ascent from Stony Creek provides many excuses to rest and admire numerous bluffs at close range; however, maintain a respect for the cliff-edge! After an hour's walk from the creek, you should be on the Pimple at GR 663079. Be-



An old signpost cat GR 642056 declares 'Mt Burrows' to the northwest. Various rock cairns lead you down through open forest to the intervening grassy saddle at GR 639058, another possible campsite. Otherwise, the foot-pad keeps slightly to the east side of the spur from the saddle. Again, keep an eye out for track markers. Higher up, the blue-purple hues of surrounding ranges slowly begin to materialise in the distance. Before you know it, the track ahead brightens as the woodland terminates just below the summit area. The summit cairn is a little further along the ridge. Consider sprawling your night's gear on a fairly flat slab on this first outcrop. The outlook is nothing short of mesmerising and should satisfy most walkers' cravings for alpine bliss. Before you, in a sweeping panorama from north-east to south-west, lies the highest continuous tract of the Australian Alps. In between and on its fringes lies an abundance of rarely visited peaks and valleys. What would it be like to trek the untracked Wabba Wilderness? Or gaze from Mt Cravensville's high point at 1358 metres? There are many possibilities. Better known, the Murray River valley can be roughly traced upstream to its uppermost point of origin, pinched between the Pilot and the Cobblers. A short walk to the precipitous north-eastern edge reveals an especially curious sight. Rising from a mass of nondescript, interlocking spurs is a small but rugged, forested pyramid of a peak—the Pimple. The next day's route leaves a way to its summit.

### Day two

Retrace your steps to the Mt Burrowa signpost, about an hour's walk from the summit. Further along, another rock platform at GR 644057 gives another campsite and limited views. More impressive slabs exist at GR 655067 as you emerge from the forest. A series of rock cairns and the occasional track marker lead you gradually north, down rock slabs



## The walk at a glance

A fire-damaged grass tree on the Pimple. **Left**, the author peers north-east from Mt Burrowa's summit towards the Pimple as a storm approaches.

*All photos by the author*

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Grade</b>          | Moderate/hard  |
| <b>Length</b>         | Two days, or three if you can spare the time   |
| <b>Distance</b>       | 16 kilometres (approximately)  |
| <b>Region</b>         | Near the border of NSW and Victoria  |
| <b>Nearest towns</b>  | Cudgewa/Walwa  |
| <b>Start, finish</b>  | Hinnes Creek car park, the Ridge Track car park  |
| <b>Maps</b>           | Guy's Forest and Pine Mountain 1:25 000 Vicmap   |
| <b>Best time</b>      | Early spring   |
| <b>Special points</b> | Take your gaiters and a self-standing tent or bivvy sack. Carry enough water for a night's camp and half a day's walking. Pack light—your feet will thank you! |

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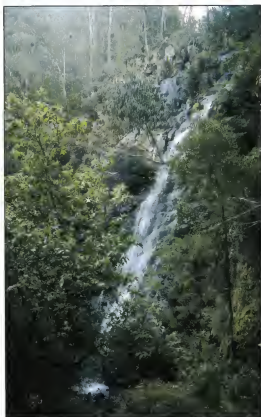
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fore the track plunges off to the north-west, go for a stroll southward among the numerous rock outcrops. For those who have a keen sense of 'something-just-round-the-corner', it should be relatively easy to find the way to a superb viewing platform atop the highest boulder. On the occasion when I visited, valley cloud ebbed in a gentle up-draught from below in the aftermath




**While Bluff Falls is not on the walk, it is worth a visit when you are in the area.**

of a storm. So did a pair of graceful wedge-tailed eagles; in ever-widening arcs, the pair spiralled upward as if in slow motion, unaware of my presence.

Rock cairns again mark the route as you leave the Pimple. The route keeps to the base of the bluffs, sidling from the western slope to the northern slope until a lovely, open-wooded spur is reached. Lower down, grass trees make an appearance in what is clearly a drier forest type. Indeed, where the track crosses the upper tributary of Stony Creek at GR 673087 is further indication—it was bone dry in late October 2004. Another intentions book nearby is the give-away that this satisfying walk is only a minute's walk from completion.

### Side trips

While you're in this neck of the woods and if you can spare the time, consider walking up nearby granite Pine Mountain at 1062 metres. Native cypress-pine trees adorn this peak. Bluff Falls also deserves a fly-by visit. A graded road takes you directly to a car park and a minute's stroll to the base of this spectacular cascade. 

Stephen Curtain is a telemark sking nut. He dabbles in ski, rafting and trekking epics in Australia and overseas and teaches outdoors education in Victoria and New South Wales. Stephen often dances on the inside and is at present producing an Australian Alps free-heel skiing film



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# The growler

King of frogs



Photographer Michael Williams writes: 'My wife Sharon and I were out walking around a swamp in western Victoria last November with a zoologist friend Clive Crouch, when we all heard a loud "crrrraaaaakkk" in the distance...but no one said anything. Hearing the call again, we all remarked at the same time "That's a growling grass frog!" According to Clive, the 'growler' had not been heard calling in the area for some years due to drought. That night, waist-deep in muddy water, we found four frogs and enjoyed observing their behaviour for several hours. Michael Williams

**IN THE AUSTRALIAN AMPHIBIAN WORLD, THE** growling grass frog is what you might call a heavy hitter. One of our largest frog species, it measures 10 centimetres from head to tail, can live for up to 18 years and has a reputation as a 'frog eater'. This reputation stems from an ability to hear the calls of other frog species. Growlers use this skill to home in on other frogs when on the hunt for food, adding them to a diet that includes insects, tadpoles, small lizards, fish and the occasional tiny bird.

Growlers live in large swamps, ponds and lakes (as well as artificial bodies of water) and are active during the warmer months. Growlers have a white, granular belly, and the skin on their back ranges from brown or dull olive to bright emerald green with black or bronze spots and lines. Their backs also carry large warts, a trait distinguishing them from the similar-looking green and golden bell frog.

Although they are most active at night, growlers also love basking in the warmth of mild, sunny days. They have no problems seeing during daylight hours and, if they hear you coming, will jump into the water with a distinctive


'plop'—often the only way to know they are around during the day.

Their call is not dissimilar to the sound of an outboard motor struggling into action: 'crawark-crawark-crok-crok'.

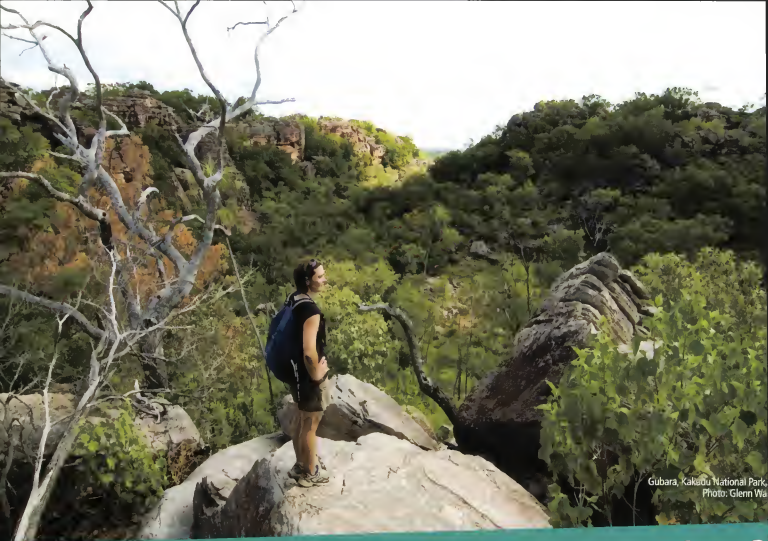
As recently as the early 1980s, growlers were considered common across much of south-eastern Australia and Tasmania. Since then, their numbers have plummeted. Growlers can no longer be found in the ACT and are listed as threatened in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. Suffering from habitat loss, predation by introduced fish and overgrazing by livestock around the edges of wetlands, growler populations have also been hit hard by a frog-killing disease called chytrid fungus. This devastating disease, which creates a layer of matting under a frog's skin that stops the skin from breathing, has already led to the loss of 70 frog species from Central and South America and could be behind the recent extinctions of eight Australian frog species.

The fungus is believed to have arrived in Australia in the 1930s with the introduction of the African clawed frog, which at that time was used in pregnancy tests. A woman's urine sample was

injected into the frog and, if the woman was pregnant, her urine would cause the frog's ovaries to start producing eggs. What nobody realised at the time was that the African clawed frog was a carrier of the deadly chytrid fungus. Although there is as yet no cure for this terrible disease, we can all take measures to prevent its spread in the wild, including the following:

- The spores of the fungus are waterborne so take care not to transport water or mud whenever you are near wetlands, dams, ponds or other bodies of water.
- Avoid touching frogs.
- Help to educate others about the disease.
- You can also assist Ray Draper to survey growler populations for fungus infections by joining the Chytrid Fungus Mapping Project (Victoria). You can contact Ray to find out how by emailing him at raydraper2004@gmail.com 
- John Sampson

To submit a photo for All Things Great and Small contact [editorial@wld.com.au](mailto:editorial@wld.com.au). We will accept photos of plants or animals. Published photos will be accompanied by some history which we will source.



Gubara, Kakadu National Park,  
Photo: Glenn Wa

## What will climate change do to your favourite places?

### What's your favourite place in Australia?

Is it the beautiful Blue Mountains? Or an awe-inspiring lookout in Kakadu?

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Prolonged droughts, rising sea levels, violent storms and cyclones will devastate our forests and bushland – our wild places. Unless we take immediate action to conserve them.

**Right now, our government supports the senseless logging of Australia's carbon-rich forests – which are the cheapest, most effective solution we have for drawing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it safely.**

We're calling on our government to end this practice.

**The forests of Tasmania's north-east – which store huge amounts of carbon – will be devastated by Gunns' forest-hungry pulp mill if the federal government gives it the go-ahead. Massive amounts of dangerous carbon will be released into our atmosphere.**

Protection of our favourite places, like Tasmania, our 'Wild Island', is the very thing that will ensure their survival into the future. A win-win situation, right?

But, currently, Kevin Rudd's government is taking no serious action to protect our forests and bushland – the places we love – as a crucial part of the climate solution. Will you?

Please help us to protect Australia's wild places so we can continue to enjoy them well into the future.

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## A fiery future

Phil Ingamells writes that the bush may never be the same again if a new proposal to increase controlled burns goes ahead

South Cascade Creek, Thompson State Forest, Victoria. Myrtle beech canopied cool-temperate rainforests such as this are very vulnerable to fire and are likely to suffer from the predicted increase in severe fires. *David Tatnall*

Predictions of more frequent and fiercer bushfires are already coming true, and they're likely to radically change the natural landscape in Victoria and much of the rest of Australia. Increasing temperatures and decreasing rainfall are drying forests, while more frequent storms will bring more lightning fronts to trigger fires across the landscape.

There is nothing new about fire in the wild. Ever since the continent of Australia broke free from Gondwana something like 50 million years ago, fire has regularly swept across the land. Indeed, fire has largely driven the evolution of the typically Australian plants—eucalypts, hakeas and many others. Many plants need fire before they will flower, drop seed or germinate. Others have a range of strategies to cope with fire, such as the eucalypts that sprout new

branches from their trunk after fire has killed off smaller branches. Snow gums die off completely above ground, but they have a massive bole of old growth tree just beneath the surface, which quickly sprouts new growth after a fire has passed. This means that what looks like a sprightly young snow gum woodland might actually be a grove of very old trees.

Over the last 50 thousand years or so, Aboriginal burning has changed this natural fire regime. In Victoria, this seems to have been most common in the grasslands and grassy woodlands, rather than the towering mountain ash forests with their ferny understoreys, or the high plains of the alps.

But some of Victoria's loveliest bits of bush, the myrtle beech canopied rainforests of the Central Highlands and Otways, or the less-visited sa-

safras and black olive-berry canopied elfin rainforests of the Errinundra Plateau, can't handle fire at all. They are remnants of the ancient Gondwanan forests, and have escaped fire since those days by hanging out in the deep shady gullies of tall eucalypt forests.

Now, with climate change, that heroic 50 million year long epic of fire evasion might be over for Victoria's rainforests. Our carbon-emitting lifestyles, and our penchant for logging tall wet forests, have left the bush surrounding these Gondwanan relics much drier, and far more fire-prone. This is a problem in itself, but the current management of these fires, with policy largely driven by popular politics, is likely to have even greater impacts to the bush.

There was public outcry at the ferocity of recent fires in Victoria—mainly the 2003 and 2006

fires in the eastern ranges, and similarly fierce fires in the Grampians. Public safety, not least the safety of firefighters, was understandably an issue, and the blame was squarely laid on a perceived lack of fuel reduction burns across the landscape. In Victoria, a recent parliamentary inquiry called for tripling the extent of fuel reduction burns across Victoria, from 130 000

the tens of thousands of largely unstudied species of insects and fungi that inhabit Victoria's natural areas, don't get a guernsey at all. Yet they are the very things that pretty much hold complex native ecosystems together.

No one is claiming that management of fire under climate change is going to be easy, and public safety is clearly an issue. But we must

## Tasmania: calls for more forest protection

### The Wilderness Society's Vica Bayley reports on the latest

Pressure is growing on the Federal and Tasmanian Governments to protect world-class forests threatened by logging on the edge of Tasmania's World Heritage Area (WHA). A recent meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Quebec, Canada, resolved that the Federal Government should 'consider, at its own discretion, extension of the property to include appropriate areas of tall eucalypt forest, having regard to the advice of International Union for Conservation of Nature [IUCN]':

World Heritage Committee members have called for Tasmania's World Heritage Area to be extended in line with IUCN advice, to properly protect tall eucalypt forests that are currently threatened by road construction and logging. The IUCN, the expert international conservation body, states that:

- There is a clear body of evidence that there are areas which may have potential to demonstrate outstanding universal value which are outside the existing boundary of the property.
- It would be desirable that a moratorium on logging activity in areas of potential outstanding universal value be considered, as logging in these areas would foreclose the option of adding these areas to the property.

This is a great outcome that reinforces the call to permanently protect Tasmania's unique World Heritage forests for the benefit of all. While protecting these forest areas would bring Tasmania into line with the wishes of the World Heritage Committee, it would also prove popular locally and have spin-off benefits for both biodiversity and climate change.

Recent science has revealed that the tall eucalypt forests of south-eastern Australia, including Tasmania, are some of the most carbon dense in the world (see Gavan McFadden's article). Protecting these forests is one of the quickest and easiest things we can do to begin the fight against climate change.

Logging and land clearing is Tasmania's biggest emitter of greenhouse pollution and Forestry Tasmania, the government-owned entity (mis)managing our forests, has released a report that shows conservative, yet alarming figures. Its own data shows how logging will reduce the natural carbon stored in the commercial forests logged by more than a quarter, or 16 million tonnes, over the next 20 years.

This carbon is being released into the atmosphere by logging and the annual forestry burns that blanket the state in smoke for weeks at a time. This year, forestry burns were responsible for high levels of discomfort and angst in the community and contributed millions of tonnes of greenhouse pollution that will exacerbate the effects of climate change.



Some 500 kilometres of firebreaks, up to 60 metres wide, have been constructed through Victoria's Central Highlands forests and other areas, with minimal observance of planning processes or public consultation. This old hollow mountain ash, potentially an important habitat tree for the endangered Leadbetter's possum, was bulldozed in case it fell over one of the new firebreaks. Phil Ingamells

hectares a year to at least 385 000 hectares. This is called 'restoring natural fire regimes', but there is no evidence to support that claim. And what's a natural fire regime under human-induced climate change anyway?

Oddly, these annual burn figures don't take into account actual wildfires, so if a one million hectare fire turns up again (we've had a couple here in recent years) there will still be a requirement to burn at least 385 000 hectares more. Victoria, either through wildfire or management burns, has incinerated about half its public land since 2002, but fire managers and planners are still claiming the state is suffering from a less-than-natural rate of fire in the landscape.

To make things worse, the process to work out the ecologically safe frequencies for management burns—how soon after a burn we can set fire to a bit of bush again without harming biodiversity—is almost entirely based on our understanding of the regeneration of trees, shrubs and some of the smaller plants. But they make up far less than ten per cent of our native species. Even the mammals, birds, frogs and reptiles, most of which are fairly well known, are rarely taken into account when deciding acceptable fire frequencies. And the bulk of our biodiversity,

look after nature as well. Fire affects different ecosystems in different ways, and the season of a burn, its severity and the frequency of burns all have different impacts. If we must burn, we must also monitor the changes in the ecological systems, so that at least we learn as we go. To do that adequately, we will have to radically increase the number of fire ecologists and other ecologists employed by our management agencies.

Building that level of expertise and experience, though, will take time. For now, if we are to hang on to our incredibly valuable evolutionary heritage, all programs for management burns should be rigorously reviewed by independent ecologists.

### Act now

Email Victoria's Minister for the Environment, Gavin Jennings, and the Premier, John Brumby, and ask them to ensure fire management guarantees the long-term safety of biodiversity in Victoria.  
gavin.jennings@parliament.vic.gov.au  
john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au  
More information at [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)



# Old growth forests: banking on the future

The Wilderness Society's Gavan McFadzean writes about the importance of old growth forests in the fight against climate change

The debate on climate change in Australia has largely focused on our need to reduce emissions from fossil fuels; often forgotten is the major role of native vegetation in reducing climate change. All that is about to change.

The United Nations climate change conference in Bali last year was historic for more than just the fact that Australia finally signed the Kyoto Protocol. It was the first time that the role of natural forests in storing greenhouse gases had been recognised by the international community. This role is set for greater recognition as a result of ground-breaking new research by the Australian National University (ANU), which has revealed that Australia's remaining natural forests store far more carbon than was previously thought.

For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that temperate forests store around 217 tonnes of carbon per hectare. ANU's research has revealed that the average amount of carbon stored in



unlogged natural forests in south-eastern Australia is about 640 tonnes per hectare, three times more than the IPCC estimates. But the most spectacular banks of carbon are found in the mountain ash forests of Victoria and Tasmania, which are up to 80 metres tall (about the height of a 25-storey building). These amazing forests store up to 2000 tonnes of carbon per hectare, ten times more than the estimate set by the IPCC.



This research should alert decision makers to the urgent need to protect native forests from woodchipping as part of any response to climate change. If these natural forests continue to be destroyed, then the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) that is released will significantly increase greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Just how do forests store carbon? Forests are giant carbon pumps, taking CO<sub>2</sub> from the air and pumping it into the soil, trunks and

Old growth forests are not only beautiful, but will be a valuable carbon storing resource both now and in the future. *Ern Mainka*

branches over hundreds of years. Logging and woodchipping release most of this carbon back into the atmosphere.

Allowing previously logged forests to regrow undisturbed, and growing plantations on previously cleared land, play an important role in helping partly to compensate for the emissions from burning fossil fuels.

While planting new trees is important, it is far less effective than protecting existing forests. It takes approximately 400 years for a mountain ash forest to recapture all the carbon lost after logging. Each year, the loss of carbon-storing capacity through logging in Victoria's forests alone is equivalent to the emissions of 2.3 million cars.

The logging industry often responds by arguing that carbon continues to be safely stored in the products made from native forests, such as furniture. The problem is that this is where only three per cent of native forests ends up. Even ignoring (as the logging industry does) the emissions from forestry road construction, post-logging regeneration burns, logging machinery and transport, for this argument to work, its proponents would have to prove that carbon stored in wood products has a longer lifespan than carbon stored in native forests.

Native forests generally reach an old growth stage after approximately 200 years and can



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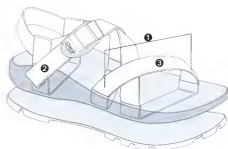


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live for several hundred years after that. Even dead and fallen trees continue to store large volumes of carbon.

Meanwhile, 70 to 80 per cent of what is removed in native forest logging operations ends up as pulp and paper products with an average life cycle of just three years, after which its stored carbon is released as CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. Of the remaining 20 to 30 per cent of the timber which is sent to saw mills, 60 per cent is discarded as offcuts which go back to the pulp and paper stream and therefore release their carbon in three years. The remainder is turned into wood products, with an average life cycle of 80 years, after which its carbon is released into the atmosphere—hardly a safe long-term carbon store.

The main problem with logging native forests, though, is that it permanently reduces their carbon carrying capacity by between 40 and 60 per cent. This is CO<sub>2</sub> which, given the short 60-year logging rotations of the native forest logging industry, is never retrieved.

Basically, logging reduces the size of the bank—permanently. In effect, you are making a withdrawal from the carbon bank that is never repaid, and is not compensated for by the short-term storage of carbon in wood products.

The only safe carbon bank is a tree, and the only thing that sucks carbon out of the atmosphere to reduce climate change is a forest, and native forests are better at it than plantations. That's why plantations do the job better for wood supply and native forests do the job better as carbon banks—but only if they are left standing.

## Woodchips

### No money for Gunns

Vica Bayley reports that the campaign to stop the Gunns Ltd pulp mill took a turn for the better when the ANZ, banker to Gunns for more than 20 years, walked away from the project and refused to finance the mill. This was a great outcome for a fantastic community campaign that put pressure on the ANZ to live up to its claims of environmental and social sustainability.

Since the ANZ's rejection, other Australian retail banks have ruled out their support for the project and Gunns has been forced offshore in the search for finance. Meanwhile in Tasmania, landowners through whose land the pulp mill's water and effluent pipeline must pass have put up a brave fight to protect their land.

Without an annual supply of 26 billion litres of fresh water, the pulp mill can't function, so the pipeline is a critical issue Gunns needs to resolve. Similarly, the mill must dump 30 billion litres of toxic effluent into Bass Strait that requires a pipeline that runs out to sea.

# The future of the river red gum forests in the balance

## Nick Roberts from the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) reports on our increasingly sick river system

The Victorian Government is about to receive a long-awaited report from the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) on the future of river red gum wetlands and forests along the Murray River in northern Victoria.

There is an urgent need for action in order to protect these precious ecosystems and the hundreds of threatened plants and animals they support. Birds such as the nationally endangered superb parrot and mammals like the squirrel glider need healthy forests and wetlands to survive. River red gum wetland forests in northern Victoria are the last remaining islands of habitat in landscapes that have been massively cleared of their original tree cover. The Barmah Forest near Echuca is the largest river red gum forest in the world and an internationally significant wetland. As little as 2.5 per cent of original vegetation remains in this region; the rest has been cleared.

Given the current lack of protection in parks and reserves, it is highly likely that significant new areas of national parks along the Murray, Goulburn and Ovens rivers will be recommended to the Brumby Government. There are national obligations to protect at least 15 per cent of the original extent of each forest type across Victoria. This means everything that remains must be protected in new parks.

In 2006, the Victorian Government promised to create new national parks if recommended by the independent VEAC. Since that time the health of the iconic Murray River has declined significantly. River health in northern Victoria has never been worse since records began. A recent study by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission found Victoria's biggest river, the Goulburn, to be one of the unhealthiest rivers in the entire Murray-Darling Basin. In light of biodiversity loss, river health and climate change, what little remains must be permanently protected in new parks. The Yorta Yorta, the traditional owners of the Barmah Forest, want to be able to jointly manage a new Barmah National Park. In what will be a Victorian first, the VEAC report may recommend exactly this for the Barmah Forest—and not before time. The VNPA believes Victoria's first ever jointly managed national park will be a significant win for Aboriginal social justice, for nature conservation and for regional tourism and employment.

While new parks will inevitably require changes in some communities that have small logging interests, VNPA believes these changes will be more than compensated for by benefits to the region of new parks and the nature-based tourism opportunities that will follow. In the interests of protecting these iconic Australian wetland forests for future generations, this government must now act decisively and create river red gum national parks.

Visit [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au) to find out how you can help.

This poses a problem for Federal Minister for the Environment Peter Garrett, as his predecessor approved the pulp mill subject to more scientific modelling being done to properly understand the impact of this toxic effluent. This modelling should rule out Bass Strait as a suitable toxic waste dump and put the onus on Peter Garrett to reject the approval of the pulp mill.

### Wielangta

In a two-to-one split judgement, the High Court has rejected Greens leader Bob Brown's application to appeal against the full Federal Court's decision, which overruled Justice Marshall's 2006 ban on logging in Tasmania's Wielangta Forest. This is a major setback for Brown, as well as for the endangered swift parrot and Wielangta stag beetle. The court did not award costs against Senator Brown, citing public interest; however, he now faces costs of some \$200 000 from Federal Court proceedings in 2007. You can read more about the judgement or donate money at [www.ontrial.info/](http://www.ontrial.info/)

### Ten per cent less forest

The Age on 22 May this year reports that Australia has ten per cent less forest than the government has believed for the last five years! This means that potentially critical forestry agreements and environmental policy have been formulated on false figures. According to the 2008 State of Forests Report—which is put out every five years—Australia's forestry reserves are 149 million hectares compared with the 2003 estimate of 164 million hectares. The report said that a new method of calculation could be responsible, rather than a reduction in forest. Environmental groups are said to be sceptical. The report also revealed that reserves of old growth forest had declined and that the number of forest species that were threatened or endangered had risen.

Readers' contributions to this department, including high-resolution digital photos or colour slides, are welcome. Items of less than 200 words are more likely to be published. Send them to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, Vic 3181 or email [editorial@wild.com.au](mailto:editorial@wild.com.au)

# WET/IS DRY

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# Sticking the boot in

Zac Zaharias surveys bushwalking boots

## Wild Gear Surveys: what they are and what they're not

The purpose of Wild Gear Surveys is to assist readers in purchasing specialist outdoors equipment of the quality and with the features most appropriate for their needs; and to save them time and money in the process.

The cost of 'objective' and meaningful testing is beyond the means not only of Wild, but of the Australian outdoors industry in general and we are not aware of such testing being regularly carried out by an outdoors magazine anywhere in the world. Similarly, given the number of products involved, field testing is beyond the means of Australia's outdoors industry. Wild Gear Surveys summarise information, collate and present it in a convenient and readily comparable form, with guidelines and advice to assist in the process of wise equipment selection.

Surveyors are selected for their knowledge of the subject and their impartiality. Surveys are checked and verified by an independent referee, and reviewed by Wild's editorial staff. Surveys are based on the items' availability and specifications at the time of the relevant issue's production; ranges and specifications may change later. Before publication each manufacturer/distributor is sent a summary of the surveyor's findings regarding the specifications of their products for verification.

Some aspects of surveys, such as the assessment of value and features—and especially the inclusion/exclusion of certain products—entail a degree of subjective judgement on the part of the surveyor, the referee and Wild, space being a key consideration.

'Value' is based primarily upon price relative to features and quality. A product with more elaborate or specialised features may be rated more highly by someone whose main concern is not price.

An important criterion for inclusion is 'wide availability'. To qualify, a product must usually be stocked by a number of specialist outdoors shops in the central business districts of the major Australian cities. With the recent proliferation of brands and models, and the constant ebb and flow of their availability, 'wide availability' is becoming an increasingly difficult concept to pin down.

Despite these efforts to achieve accuracy, impartiality, comprehensiveness and usefulness, no survey is perfect. Apart from the obvious human elements that may affect assessment, the quality, materials and specifications of any product may vary markedly from batch to batch and even from sample to sample. It is ultimately the responsibility of readers to determine what is best for their particular circumstances and for the use they have in mind for gear reviewed.



Walking can be a dirty business; make sure you buy a pair of boots that will keep you out of trouble.

Zac Zaharias

**THE RIGHT PAIR OF BOOTS CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE** between an enjoyable walk and abject misery. I have seen some disasters, including the soles of one pair of boots that came off during a trek in Nepal, leaving the hapless walker to use gaffer tape to keep the soles in place. I've owned over a dozen pairs during the 40 or so years I've been walking, and have tried everything from heavy army boots to humble Dunlop Volleys. Mind you, I haven't been courageous enough yet to wear the low-cut gumbboot-style shoes that are de rigueur for Bali porters. Long experience has taught me that there is no substitute for selecting and fitting the right boots for the job: it can save your feet from torture.

There's an enormous array of boots available now. Traditional full-grained leather walking boots no longer dominate the market, as composite boots and walking shoes become increasingly popular. Modern materials such as nubuck, suede, Gore-Tex and other synthetics are combined in different fabric mixes to give strength, waterproofness and durability at a lower cost and weight compared with traditional leather boots. The broader range of boots on the market reflects the changing nature of bushwalking as well as changes in footwear fashion. Fewer people are walking off track in demanding environments such as snow, ice,

scrub, mud or moraine, and most of the boots and shoes now sold are designed for use on formed tracks. If you intend to walk in more demanding environments, it is important not simply to choose lighter shoes out of habit, as they may not be up to the job. In some instances, the wrong shoes could have serious consequences: just try walking on a glacier, or kicking steps through a snowdrift, in a pair of low-cut walking shoes.



The Scarpa SL, a classic leather boot.

## Boots for bushwalking

|   | Suitable for | Weight, grams | Asolo height, centimetres | Sole rubber | Upper material | Flexibility | Water resistance | Durability | Value   | Comments  | Approx price, \$ |
|---|--------------|---------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|------------|---------|---|------------------|
| <b>3 Peaks China</b> <a href="http://www.wildernesswear.com.au">www.wildernesswear.com.au</a> |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Trakker   | W            | 770           | 13                        | M           | FL             | M-L         | ●●●              | ●●● 1/2    | ●●● 1/2 | Waterproof-breathable membrane; men's and women's sizes | 150              |
| <b>Aku</b> <a href="http://www.aku.it">www.aku.it</a>   |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Icaro   | WE           | 635           | 14                        | M           | CS             | H           | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●●      | Gore-Tex; men's and women's models                      | 300              |
| Lagorai GTX   | E            | 730           | 14                        | H           | FL             | L           | ●●●●             | ●●●●       | ●●● 1/2 | As above  | 400              |
| Sulterra Injected GTX   | E            | 590           | 16                        | M           | ST             | M           | ●●               | ●●●        | ●●      | Also CS, FL and Microfibre versions                     | 400              |
| <b>Armond</b> <a href="http://www.armond.com">www.armond.com</a>                              |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Marebego  | E            | 735           | 14                        | H           | FL             | L           | ●●● 1/2          | ●●● 1/2    | ●●● 1/2 | Anfibio leather   | 290              |
| <b>Asolo</b> EU and Asia <a href="http://www.asolo.com">www.asolo.com</a>                     |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Powermatic 250 NBK Tundra   | E            | 770           | 15.5                      | H           | N              | L           | ●●●              | ●●● 1/2    | ●●● 1/2 | Men's and women's sizes; wide fitting sizes available   | 330              |
| Powermatic 350 NBK Tundra   | E            | 800           | 15.5                      | H           | N              | L           | ●●●              | ●●● 1/2    | ●●● 1/2 | As above  | 340              |
| TPS 530   | E            | 820           | 14                        | M           | FL             | L           | ●●● 1/2          | ●●● 1/2    | ●●● 1/2 | Gore-Tex XCR lining                                     | 400              |
| <b>Columbia</b> <a href="http://www.columbia.com">www.columbia.com</a>                        |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Coremic Ridge   | D            | 586           | 11                        | M           | CS             | H           | ● 1/2            | ●●         | ●● 1/2  | Wide fit available                                      | 130              |
| Packus Ridge  | W            | 566           | 12                        | M           | CS             | H           | ● 1/2            | ●●         | ●●      | Omni-Tech water proof-breathable liner; anti-microbial  | 180              |
| Ocanto Peak   | E            | 629           | 15                        | M           | CS             | M           | ●●               | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | As above  | 220              |
| <b>Garment</b> <a href="http://www.garment.com.au">www.garment.com.au</a>                     |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Synchro Plus  | E            | 720           | 14                        | H           | FL             | M           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●●     | Gore-Tex lining   | 300              |
| Anrada  | W            | 700           | 15                        | H           | CS             | M           | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  |   | 300              |
| <b>Hi-Tec</b> <a href="http://www.hi-tec.com">www.hi-tec.com</a>                              |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Vista   | W            | 580           | 13                        | M           | CN             | M           | ●● 1/2           | ●●●        | ●● 1/2  |   | 180              |
| V-Lite Fasthike   | W            | 510           | 15                        | M           | CN             | M           | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | Women's model available                                 | 230              |
| Altitude  | WE           | 525           | 13                        | M           | N              | M           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●● 1/2  | As above  | 250              |
| <b>Kathmandu</b> <a href="http://www.kathmandu.com.au">www.kathmandu.com.au</a>               |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Thurair Mid   | D/W          | 500           | 12                        | M           | CS             | H           | ●                | ● 1/2      | ●●      | Men's model only  | 230              |
| Randonnee Proof   | E            | 715           | 14                        | H           | FL             | M-L         | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●●     | Women's model available                                 | 330              |
| <b>Keen</b> <a href="http://www.keenfootwear.co.nz">www.keenfootwear.co.nz</a>                |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Targhee II Mid  | D/W          | 482           | 11.5                      | M           | CN             | M-H         | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●●      | Men's and women's sizes                                 | 280              |
| <b>La Sportiva</b> <a href="http://www.lasportiva.com">www.lasportiva.com</a>                 |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                  |
| Onyx XCR  | W            | 450           | 13                        | M           | CS             | M-H         | ●●               | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | Gore-Tex XCR lining; women's model available            | 260              |
| Halite GTX  | W            | 500           | 13                        | H           | CS             | H           | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | Gore-Tex lining; women's model available                | 280              |
| Typhoon GTX   | E            | 600           | 14                        | H           | FL             | M           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●●     | Also available in nubuck; Gore-Tex lining               | 330              |

As a general rule, the longer the walk, the heavier the pack and the rougher the terrain, the more rigid, durable and supportive the boots need to be. Without supportive boots, walkers have a higher probability of suffering sprained ankles and slowing the progress of the rest of the group. However, walking in heavier boots also takes more effort and energy, and they can make your feet quite hot, which increases the risk of getting blisters. Walkers carrying light packs on formed trails will find such boots cumbersome, whereas lightweight shoes provide more comfort and greater flexibility.

Ultimately, your choice of boots should be based on the conditions in which you will be using them. This survey focuses primarily on boots available from specialist outdoors retailers; some brands, however, can be found in shops that specialise in other outdoors sports, such as fishing, work-wear and disposal stores.

### Suitable for

There are three categories in the table that identify the most suitable use for each boot style. As a rule, low-cut, flexible boots are only suitable for day walks, or perhaps a weekend walk at a pinch. While they may be light, with plenty of ventilation and grippy soles, they don't provide a lot of support, particularly for off-track

walking. For weekend walks, the pack will be heavier due to the extra equipment being carried, so the boots need to be stiffer, cut higher and have a more durable sole. Extended walks of five days' duration or more will often involve difficult terrain, remote locations and perhaps more climatic extremes. Boots for extended walks need to give good ankle support, have durable soles, stiff shanks and toughened or reinforced wear areas, and be water-resistant.

### Weight

The weights listed are for a single size-41 boot and are subject to some variation. While the current trend is to go for lighter boots, they are not always the most suitable. For example, a heavier boot with a rigid shank can be driven into snow, ice or hardened earth to provide an edge or platform to stand on. Instep crampons can be worn and the boot's weight affords greater stability and grip on most difficult surfaces. Lighter boots are more suitable for hot climates or areas with good tracks.

### Ankle height

The boots were measured from the outside at the highest part of the upper to the top of the



The Mountain Designs Venture is a synthetic and suede hybrid with a Gore-Tex lining.

## Boots for bushwalking continued

|  | Suitable for | Weight, grams | Ankle height, centimetres | Sole rubber | Upper material | Flexibility | Water resistance | Durability | Value   | Comments  | Approx. price, \$ |
|--|--------------|---------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|------------------|------------|---------|---|-------------------|
| <b>Merrill China</b> www.merrill.com                     |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Phaser Burst   | E            | 610           | 13                        | M           | FL             | M           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●● 1/2 |   | 260               |
| <b>Mountain Designs China</b> www.mountaindesigns.com.au |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Venture  | W            | 680           | 14.5                      | H           | CS             | M           | ●●               | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | Gore-Tex XCR lining   | 300               |
| Altitude   | E            | 780           | 15.5                      | H           | FL             | M-L         | ●●● 1/2          | ●●●        | ●●●     | Gore-Tex lining   | 350               |
| <b>RaiChie Romania</b> www.raichie.ch                    |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Scout GTX  | W            | 625           | 13                        | M           | CS             | M           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●●     | Gore-Tex lining; available in nubuck  | 300               |
| Mt Camp GTX  | E            | 750           | 15                        | H           | N              | M-L         | ●●●              | ●●● 1/2    | ●●●     | Gore-Tex lining   | 390               |
| Mt Trail GTX   | E            | 825           | 15                        | H           | FL             | M-L         | ●●●●             | ●●●●       | ●●●●    | Gore-Tex lining; heel retention feature with women's model; also has a female-specific shank; available in nubuck | 430               |
| <b>Rossi Australia</b> www.rossi boots.com.au            |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| 290 Barron   | W            | 683           | 14                        | M           | N              | L           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●●●    | Waterproof lining   | 195               |
| 110 Raptor   | W/E          | 720           | 15                        | M           | FL             | L-M         | ●●● 1/2          | ●●●        | ●●●●    | As above  | 240               |
| <b>Salomon China</b> www.salomon sports.com              |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Mega Trek 6 WP   | W/E          | 725           | 15                        | M           | CS             | H           | ●●               | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | Gore-Tex lining   | 300               |
| Revo SCS GTX   | W            | 600           | 15                        | M           | ST             | H           | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●●      | Gore-Tex lining; synthetic uppers; lightweight boot   | 380               |
| <b>Scarpa Italy</b> www.scarpa.net                       |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Trek   | E            | 700           | 13.5                      | H           | FL             | M-L         | ●●● 1/2          | ●●● 1/2    | ●●●●    | A popular model; wide-fitting sizes available   | 300               |
| SL   | E            | 860           | 13.5                      | H           | FL             | L           | ●●●●             | ●●●●       | ●●● 1/2 | Wide-fitting sizes available  | 400               |
| ZG 10 GTX  | E            | 760           | 15                        | H           | N              | L           | ●●●●             | ●●● 1/2    | ●●●     | Gore-Tex lining   | 430               |
| <b>Snowgum China</b> www.snowgum.com.au                  |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Cooper   | W            | 559           | 12                        | M           | CS             | H           | ●●               | ●●         | ●●      | Coolmax liner   | 170               |
| Narran   | W            | 661           | 13                        | M           | CN             | M           | ●●               | ●●         | ●●      |   | 200               |
| <b>Vasque China</b> www.vasque.com                       |              |               |                           |             |                |             |                  |            |         |   |                   |
| Breeze XCR   | W            | 580           | 14                        | M           | CN             | M           | ●● 1/2           | ●● 1/2     | ●● 1/2  | Gore-Tex lining; men's and women's sizes; narrow, standard and wide-fitting sizes available                       | 300               |
| Zephyr 2 GTX   | W/E          | 745           | 16                        | M           | CN             | M           | ●●●              | ●●●        | ●●●     | Gore-Tex lining; standard and wide-fitting sizes available  | 330               |
| Wasatch GTX Wide   | E            | 765           | 15                        | H           | N              | M-L         | ●●● 1/2          | ●●● 1/2    | ●●●●    | Gore-Tex lining; men's and women's sizes; narrow, standard and wide-fitting sizes available                       | 350               |

● Poor ●● average ●●● good ●●●● excellent **Suitable for:** Day walking, Extended walking, Weekend walking **Weight:** is for a single size 41 boot **Ankle height:** maximum height above top of sole for a size-41 boot **Sole rubber:** Hard, Medium, Soft **Upper material:** CN combination nubuck, CS combination suede, FL full-grain leather, Nubuck leather, Suede, ST Synthetic **Flexibility:** High, Low, Medium. † Not seen by surveyor ‡ Not seen by referee **The country** listed after the manufacturer/brand name is the country in which the products are made.

## Buy right

- Consider how long the majority of your walking trips last and the types of terrain you expect to encounter. You should quickly be able to come up with a short list of boots to consider. If you do a range of trips varying in duration and terrain, you might even consider buying a second pair of boots as finding one style to cover all environments is difficult. It is important to consider the trade-offs—namely, a lighter, more comfortable boot versus one that is heavier, more durable and more supportive.
- Try the boots on. Always fit boots to both feet (most of us have one foot that is bigger than the other) and wear walking socks. Most specialist stores these days have ramps for you to walk up and down, so go for a test run. Get a feel for how they track, how easily they flex and where any pressure points may be. Check where your toes end up when you walk downhill: if your boots are too tight-fitting, you'll end up with tender toes.

- Try on as many sizes as you can. If you like a particular brand but it doesn't fit, you should consider another brand that does fit rather than settle for either a tight or a sloppy fit. Ultimately, ill-fitting boots will cause you grief.
- Check the heel area in particular and make sure that the boot doesn't ride up when you push off the ball of the foot.
- Consider how waterproof you need your boots to be. Are you going to be walking in a generally dry environment on formed tracks or are you trekking along the Kokoda Track or in the Himalayas? You can pay extra for waterproof liners, but do you really need them?
- Boots take time to 'break in', particularly the more rigid styles—which should eventually mould nicely to your feet. Be careful not to judge boots too harshly if they feel stiff or uncomfortable early on. Remember, you are buying something to protect your feet and enhance your walking capability, not a pair of bedside slippers.

sole (again, on a size-41 boot). Generally speaking, boots that cover the ankle bones will provide greater lateral support than lower-cut boots. They also have a higher water entry line, making them more suitable for walking in mud, snow and streams.

## Sole rubber

All sole rubber was assessed as being hard, medium or soft. The lighter boots generally had softer soles, not dissimilar to those found on many running shoes. The softer soles tend to absorb shock better, and some manufacturers are experimenting with shock-absorption sacs, similar in style to those found in some jogging shoes. The Vibram-type soles made of harder rubber offer less shock absorption but are more durable. The harder materials are also impervious to stones, sharp sticks and other hazards found on the ground.

## Upper material

Full-grained leather is the traditional material for serious bushwalking boots and it is a tough, thick, long-lasting and water-resistant material. The best leather boots are beautifully crafted and shaped to fit a foot, often with minimal stitching. Nubuck is leather that has been sanded, leaving a rough surface, which tends to hide

# REVOLUTIONARY EVOLUTION

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07



## ZG10

*An exceptionally comfortable and luxurious trekking boot. The ZG10 combines the modern features of the Zero Gravity design with a full leather upper. Using Nubuck leather and a Gore-Tex® lining, these boots are sure to keep you dry and protected in the most harsh of conditions. Incorporating an Articulated Ankle System for better ankle comfort and the Performance-Flex midsole the ZG10 offers added protection and stability in uneven terrain. Using the lightness and cushioning of the Vibram® Hi-Trail sole, Scarpa has created one of the most comfortable leather boots to date! Built upon the same exacting high standards as the SL, Trek Pro and Trek models – all of which have been specifically designed and manufactured by Scarpa in Italy for Australian conditions. Australian bushwalking just evolved to the next level.*





cuts and scuffs. Like full-grained leather it is naturally water-resistant and can be combined with breathable waterproof fabrics to give extra water resistance. Suede or split leather is a cheaper and thinner material and is often found in lower-priced to mid-range boots. It is commonly combined with synthetic fabrics to produce boots that are comfortable and flexible. However, boots that use composite materials tend to have more stitching, which can be both an entry point for water and a point of failure in boots.

## Care of boots and feet

A boot's life can be prolonged with regular cleaning and reconditioning with appropriate waxes or applications. Don't use dubbin as it rots stitching and opens up the pores in the leather, thereby increasing the speed of water ingress. Synthetic uppers can be reproofed with sprays available from specialist outdoors retailers. Wet boots should be dried out slowly and reconditioned to keep them supple.

Don't think you won't get blisters just because you have never had blisters before. Blisters generally occur at rub points and these are typically in the heel area and the tops of the toes. Carrying a blister kit and/or zinc oxide sports tape is a must, as most walkers will sooner or later succumb to this very common problem. It is always best to tape up your feet as soon as you feel 'hot spots' rather than waiting for the blister to form. The new 'plastic skin' blister kits are very effective except that when your feet are wet, they tend not to stick well. Sports tape is the most effective and resilient tape around and works in all climates.

If your feet become wet for prolonged periods of time, such as in the tropics or when walking through water, it is vital that you dry them daily, allowing the skin to harden. Feet must be checked daily and applications such as anti-fungal foot powder and/or zinc cream can be helpful. Blisters are best burst with a sterilised needle, treated with an antiseptic solution such as Betadine and then covered.

Thick walking socks, or even two pairs of socks, are preferable to thin ones as they minimise hot spots and blisters. Socks should be dried out at the end of the day, and it is useful to have a spare dry pair to wear while you dry out the wet ones.

## Flexibility

I rated the stiffness of the boots as high, medium or low by a simple flex test. I also tested them for linear flexibility by wearing each style and walking in them, as well as for torsional rigidity by twisting them. Stiffness is often increased by the addition of materials such as shanks and collars. Stiffer boots that do not flex as much are harder to walk in, but over time even these boots do loosen up and mould to your feet, a process called 'breaking in'. As dis-

cussed previously, stiffer and more rigid boots provide significant benefits over rough terrain, and in time, as you get accustomed to walking in these boots, their restrictions become less noticeable.

## Water resistance

Most manufacturers claim that their boots are waterproof, but these claims need to be taken with a grain of salt. In reality, unless you are wearing double plastic mountaineering boots, water will eventually get in—particularly if you are walking in persistently inclement weather or in wet and muddy terrain. Many manufacturers use Gore-Tex or another waterproof fabric to create an impervious layer. While this helps, the layer does break down through wear and tear over time. Additionally, the idea of using Gore-Tex in theory is to disperse sweat, in order to reduce dampness in the feet. However, even the most breathable fabrics work best in cooler climates. Also, other materials can often cover the lining, thereby reducing breathability.



The La Sportiva Onyx is a light and flexible mid-cut boot.

Seams are potential entry points for water, and composite boots (by the nature of their construction) have many more seams than a full leather boot. Quality leather boot construction entails eliminating as many seams as possible. The biggest source of water ingress is through the top of a boot, hence higher-cut boots provide a definite advantage over lower-cut shoes and boots. The material and design of the boot tongue also plays a big part: for maximum waterproofness the tongue should include side webbing that extends right to the top of the eyelets.

The rating for water resistance is subjective as I was not able to field-test the boots; however, with over 40 years of walking experience, I have walked in all styles of shoes and boots in a full range of conditions and terrain. In rating the boots I looked at three components: the upper material used in construction (40 per cent), the number and the location of seams (30 per cent) and the height of the boots, including the effectiveness of the tongue (30 per cent).

## Durability

This rating is also subjective. However, in my experience, heavier, stiffer leather boots with

hard rubber soles tend to be the most durable. The position of the seams and reinforcing material also have a bearing on durability. Again, in my experience, most composite boots fail in the area around the side of the boot at its widest point: either the stitching comes apart or the toe and sole separate. I've rarely worn out the sole first. In rating durability I considered the quality and type of material used in the soles and uppers, including reinforcing (40 per cent); the quality of construction (30 per cent); and the placement and number of seams (30 per cent).

## Value

Value was judged by how well the boot could be expected to perform relative to its price. Boots with a high durability rating fared best (75 per cent), while cost was factored in at 25 per cent to give the final rating. However, you should keep in mind that if your planned use for the boots is going to place low demands on them, you may be better served with a mid-range or low-priced model.

## Comments

A number of manufacturers sell men's and women's models, usually under different names. As well, many provide a range of widths, from narrow to wide. Men's boots tend to be wider and come in a broader range of sizes, whereas women's boots are narrow in the foot, lower in height and tend to have narrow sleeves for the Achilles area. Sometimes you may find a model that suits you irrespective of the gender tag on the boot.

## Price

The price shown is the recommended retail price provided by the distributors and verified through store visits. In some models, a number of different upper materials are available, usually with different price tags. The survey only shows the recommended retail price for the model and material highlighted in the table.

## Other brands available

| Brand     | Distributor       | Contact        |
|-----------|-------------------|----------------|
| Alico     | Anso              | (03) 9471 1500 |
| Chaco     | Spelean           | (02) 9966 9800 |
| Lafuma    | Adventure Extreme | (02) 4966 4900 |
| Teva      | True Alliance     | (02) 8306 3352 |
| Zamberlan | Beretta Australia | (03) 9799 4999 |

Zac Zoharias has been an outdoor tragic for more than 30 years. He spends much of his life between running his consulting business and travelling to as many places around the globe as he can, pursuing his passion for cross-country skiing, bushwalking and mountaineering. He is at present working as a guide on the Kokoda Track.

The survey was refereed by Steve Waters

# LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

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# Hybrid jackets: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE?

Alistair McGhie surveys the latest windproof fleece and soft-shell jackets

## Wild Gear Surveys: what they are and what they're not

(See box on page 71.)

**YOUR TRUSTY FLEECE JACKET KEEPS YOU WARM,** it breathes, stretches, is light and probably packs down to nothing. But the moment you leave the tree line and make for the summit, or return to the sideline from the shelter of the pie van, and get hit by an icy wind, your fleece begins to lose heat. If the wind brings rain, things can quickly get chilly. Enter windproof fleeces and soft-shell jackets.

Windproof fleeces and soft-shell jackets have been around for a decade now and it isn't difficult to see how the outdoors gear industry came to create them. Waterproof bushwalking jackets, while essential for survival in the outdoors, have some drawbacks: they can be restrictive and uncomfortable, breathability is an issue so they sometimes feel clammy and damp, they are noisy and, perhaps most significantly, on their own they don't keep you very warm. Fleece, on the other hand, does keep you warm but is no match for the wind or rain. Windproof fleece and soft-shell jackets are a successful mixture of the two. They do demand throwing away some of the old conceptions of what is suitable for the outdoors, particular the idea of staying 'dry'—but more on that later.

It is important to understand the basic differences between windproof fleeces and soft-shells. Windproof fleece jackets tend to be very warm, using thick insulating materials and blocking

out the wind with a membrane or a dense weave; this generally makes them unsuitable for more aerobic activities but perfect for easy walking or sitting around in the cold at camp. Soft-shells are more suited to aerobic activities—they have lighter insulation and greater breathability—but on the flip side they are less comfortable sitting around at that cold camp. Windproof fleeces and soft-shells are designed to be suitable for all but the most extreme weather conditions. They will keep you warm when it is windy and keep you

Administrative and Editorial Coordinator, Mathew Farrell, heading towards the light, FitzRoy Patagonia. Tim Billington **Left**, the OR Mithril is the only soft-shell in the survey which is waterproof.

## Buy right

- Some of the fabrics used in windproof fleeces and soft-shell jackets are more robust than others and may feel quite stiff. Others are light, soft and stretchy. Try on a wide range of brands to find out how the fabrics feel, especially over a base layer and under a waterproof jacket.
- Test this theory: the more features it has, the heavier the jacket. Consider the intended uses for your jacket and then match the features to their purpose. For example, hoods, powder cuffs, pit (or tricep) zips and abrasion-resistant elbows and shoulders all relate to specific uses.
- The fact that you spent 100 per cent of your pay packet on your new jacket doesn't mean that it will magically be waterproof. A windproof fleece or a soft-shell jacket is generally only going to be water-resistant (although there are some exceptions).
- A low-fleece pile will be fine if you intend to use your jacket for aerobic activities. However, if there's a long queue at the pie van, you'll probably wish you'd chosen a thicker fleece.
- On the other hand, if you like to go hard, don't get a thick windproof fleece that will have you overheating in no time. You would be better served by a breathable soft-shell jacket.



pretty dry in all but the heaviest rain. While a straight fleece or waterproof jacket can also do this, most of the time one of these hybrid jackets will do the job more comfortably, particularly when the going gets more aerobic. Anyone who has walked in a waterproof jacket will know that when you are working hard, sweat alone can make you just as damp as if you were walking in light rain with no waterproof jacket. If you are happy to ditch the idea of staying perfectly 'dry', then a windproof fleece or soft-shell could increase your comfort range. It is also important

to realise that 'soft-shell' is a widely used term and covers a wide range of garments made of fabrics varying from waterproof to only mildly water-resistant. Soft-shells generally provide less warmth than windproof fleeces, but are more water-resistant while also cutting out most, if not all, wind. The external fabrics of soft-shells are highly abrasion-resistant and the thinner inner layers wick away moisture through a combination of the properties of the materials and the heat generated by the body during aerobic activity. Soft-shells are usually constructed

in one of two ways: out of a stretchy woven two- or three-ply weave treated with a durable water-repellency polymer (DWR), these jackets are usually highly breathable but not as water-resistant as the second mode of construction, which utilises some kind of breathable membrane. Membrane jackets tend to be more water-resistant but less breathable (the two are usually directly correlated). Membrane soft-shells can be fully waterproof or close to waterproof, but it does make them less suitable for aerobic activities.

## Windproof fleece and soft-shell jackets

|  | Fabric<br>Make                                      | Type of<br>jacket     | Comments   | Price<br>range, £ |
|--|---|-----------------------|--|-------------------|
| <b>Arc'teryx</b> Canada <a href="http://www.arcteryx.com">www.arcteryx.com</a> †                     |   |                       |  |                   |
| Epsilon AR   | Bonded Poly Micro-Grid Fleece                       | Soft-shell (woven)    | Men's and women's cut; storm flap and chin guard; stretch wrist gussets; two laminated chest pockets with laminated zip; laminated hem drawcord  | 370               |
| Gamma SV   | Polartec Power Shield                               | Soft-shell (membrane) | Storm-flap; hem drawcord; moulded zip garages; one internal chest pocket; microfleece collar; two hand pockets   | 600               |
| <b>Berghaus</b> China <a href="http://www.berghaus.com">www.berghaus.com</a>                         |   |                       |  |                   |
| Ariana   | AWL 300 Windfool                                    | Windproof fleece      | Zippered pockets; internal chest pocket; elasticised hem drawcord  | 190               |
| Strike   | Gore Windstopper Soft Shell Vega                    | Soft-shell (membrane) | Women's model called Prime; three external pockets with zips; sleeve pocket; thumb loops; hood   | 500               |
| <b>Exofficio</b> USA <a href="http://www.exofficio.com">www.exofficio.com</a> ¶                      |   |                       |  |                   |
| Latitude   | Latitude Stretch                                    | Soft-shell (woven)    | Men's and women's cuts; Velcro cuffs; sleeve pocket; chest pocket; two handwarmer pockets; zip-off hood  | 250               |
| <b>Kathmandu</b> Vietnam <a href="http://www.kathmandu.com.au">www.kathmandu.com.au</a>              |   |                       |  |                   |
| Velodrome †  | Polartec Wind Pro and Thermo-stretch                | Windproof fleece      | Women's model called Hub; thumb loops; elliptical hem; two stash pockets with reflective trim  | 210               |
| Force 10 V2  | Windfleece  | Windproof fleece      | Men's and women's cuts; zippered pockets; hem drawcord; high collar  | 300               |
| <b>Low Alpine</b> Asia <a href="http://www.lowalpine.com">www.lowalpine.com</a> ¶                    |   |                       |  |                   |
| Multi Pitch  | Stormweave Stretch Nylon Soft Shell Fabric          | Soft-shell (woven)    | Men's and women's cuts; fleece-lined collar; zippered handwarmer pockets; hem and collar drawcord; tapered shape   | 200               |
| Wildcat  | Stormweave Windshield with Stormweave Stretch Nylon | Soft-shell (membrane) | Women's model called Ilex; fleece-lined collar; mesh pockets with zips that double as vents; concealed chest pocket; stretch fabrics under arms and on side panels; hem drawcord           | 220               |
| Glacier Pro Jacket   | Polartec WindBloc with Stormweave Stretch Nylon     | Soft-shell (membrane) | Men's and women's cuts; deep chest pockets; drop tail; fleece-lined collar; water-resistant front zip with zip garage; reflective trim   | 330               |
| <b>Macpac</b> China <a href="http://www.macpac.co.nz">www.macpac.co.nz</a> †                         |   |                       |  |                   |
| Revelation   | Polartec Power Shield                               | Soft-shell (woven)    | Offset shoulder seams; zippered pockets; heavily insulated   | 240               |
| <b>Mammut</b> China <a href="http://www.mammut.ch">www.mammut.ch</a> ¶                               |   |                       |  |                   |
| Alto   | Repel SOFTech                                       | Soft-shell (woven)    | Women's model called Nimba; mesh handwarmer pockets; Velcro cuffs; hem and collar drawcords; sleeve pocket; reinforced shoulders and arms  | 330               |
| <b>Mont</b> China <a href="http://www.mont.com">www.mont.com</a> ¶                                   |   |                       |  |                   |
| Space Junky  | Schoeller WB 400 Extreme                            | Soft-shell (woven)    | Men's and women's cut; zippered handwarmer pockets; fleece-lined collar with drawcord; hem drawcord; chest pocket; sleeve utility pocket   | 320               |
| <b>Mountain Designs</b> China <a href="http://www.mountaindesigns.com">www.mountaindesigns.com</a>   |   |                       |  |                   |
| Sedgwick   | Repel Wind  | Soft-shell (membrane) | Women's model called Ulandra; stretch fleece; laminated pockets  | 260               |
| Conquestador   | As above  | Soft-shell (membrane) | Women's model called Quest; elliptical hem with drawcord; welded chest pocket; handwarmer pockets; articulated elbows and gusseted arms; pit zips  | 280               |
| <b>Mountain Hardware</b> Asia <a href="http://www.mountainhardware.com">www.mountainhardware.com</a> |   |                       |  |                   |
| Synchro  | Conduit Soft-shell                                  | Soft-shell (membrane) | Men's and women's cut; external water-resistant taped seams; internal zippered pocket; welded chest and hand pockets with water-resistant zips; hem drawcord                               | 400               |
| <b>North Face</b> China <a href="http://www.thenorthface.com">www.thenorthface.com</a> ¶             |   |                       |  |                   |
| Windwall   | WindWall Polyester Bonded Fleece                    | Windproof fleece      | Men's and women's cut; zippered handwarmer pockets; elasticised cuffs  | 190               |
| Apex Bionic soft-shell   | Apex ClimateBlock                                   | Soft-shell            | Men's and women's cut; two handwarmer pockets; Napoleon pocket; hem drawcord and Velcro cuffs  | 250               |
| <b>Outdoor Research</b> Asia <a href="http://www.outdoorresearch.com">www.outdoorresearch.com</a> ¶  |   |                       |  |                   |
| Logic Jacket   | OR Stretch-woven Soft-Shell                         | Soft-shell (woven)    | Women's model called Insight; very breathable; hem and collar drawcord; zippered Napoleon pocket with media port; two zippered hand pockets  | 200               |
| Credo Jacket   | OR Laminate Soft-shell                              | Soft-shell (membrane) | Women's model called Solitude; highly water-resistant; taped seams; hem and collar drawcord; zippered Napoleon pocket; two zippered hand pockets; zippered internal pocket with media port | 300               |
| Mithril Stormshell   | Waterproof Ventia                                   | Soft-shell (membrane) | Men's and women's cuts; waterproof; taped seams; water-resistant zips; large hood; two zippered hand pockets and one internal pocket; hem drawcord   | 400               |
| <b>Pallin</b> China <a href="http://www.paddyallin.com.au">www.paddyallin.com.au</a>                 |   |                       |  |                   |
| Catalyst jacket  | Polartec WindBloc                                   | Soft-shell (membrane) | Men's and women's cut; hem and collar drawcord; powder cuffs; pit zips   | 250               |
| <b>Snowgum</b> China <a href="http://www.snowgum.com.au">www.snowgum.com.au</a>                      |   |                       |  |                   |
| Tobin  | Wind-TEC Fleece                                     | Windproof fleece      | Handwarmer pockets; adjustable waist   | 130               |
| Rymill   | Wind-TEC Soft Shell                                 | Soft-shell (membrane) | Handwarmer pockets; adjustable waist; hood   | 180               |
| Fremont  | Gore Windstopper                                    | Soft-shell (membrane) | Handwarmer pockets; upper arm and chest pockets; internal draft flap; elliptical hem   | 280               |

† not seen by surveyor ¶ not seen by referee

The country listed after the manufacturer/brand name is the country in which the products are made



## Design

One of the first things you notice about windproof fleece and soft-shell jackets is the cut. They are either a relaxed, looser style or a fitted active cut. A relaxed cut is likely to be accompanied by only a handful of features, such as a drawcord for cinching the hem of the jacket and elasticised cuffs, while the fleece will be comparatively thick and warm. This fit is most common in windproof fleeces, making them very comfortable, and suitable for a wide range of low- to medium-intensity activities, from bushwalking to cruising around town.

The fitted active cut is generally the domain of the soft-shell jacket. On these jackets you'll see a thinner fleece layer, and everything will stretch, adjust, unzip, open out, loosen off and tighten down—which spells medium- to high-intensity aerobic activity. When they are used for aerobic activities such as cross-country skiing, rock and alpine climbing, snowshoeing, long steep walks and mountain biking, soft-shells come into their own: nothing matches their combination of breathability, comfort, protection and durability.

## Bombproof but not waterproof

Because windproof fleece and soft-shell jackets often feature sealed taped seams, hoods, two-way front zips, hem drawcords and adjustable cuffs—all attributes found on waterproof hard-shell jackets—you might assume that they too are waterproof. As well, manufacturers often describe their materials as being water-resistant or water-repellent, but do they provide protection in wet weather? Windproof fleece and soft-shell jackets are treated with a durable water-repellent polymer (DWR), which is applied to the outermost fabric layer. DWR gets into the fibres and increases the hydrophobic properties of the fabric, causing water to bead and roll off. In anything more than light to moderate rain, however, water will get through the DWR. In other words, the combination of the weave of the fabric and DWR treatment makes windproof fleeces and soft-shells water-resistant, but not waterproof. There is also some maintenance involved as DWR is not permanent and, over time, the treatment will wash or wear off and need to be reapplied. This entails washing your windproof fleece or soft-shell jacket in the same way you wash your waterproof jacket to restore its water-repellency: You wash it, rinse it, reapply a DWR treatment (which you can pick up at outdoors gear shops) and put it in the dryer on low heat.

Windproof fleeces feature a windproof and water-resistant membrane, similar to a traditional shell jacket. Thus, they can be less breathable than said shell jacket.

My suggestion is to combine your versatile, highly breathable windproof fleece or soft-shell jacket with one of the super-lightweight waterproof shells on the market. Then your well-maintained windproof fleece or soft-shell will shine in 90 per cent of the conditions you'll encounter, and if things get too extreme, you'll have a compact lightweight outer shell in the bottom of your pack to get you through.

## Intended use

When it comes to choosing a windproof fleece or soft-shell jacket, you'll need a good idea of what you intend to use it for. Will warmth be the priority, or breathability? Will you wear your windproof fleece as a base layer? If so, does your waterproof or down jacket fit comfortably



**Clockwise from top left**, eligible bachelor number one, the clean-cut Arc'teryx Epsilon AR. The adventure-loving North Face Wind Wall Jacket. The Lowe Alpine Glacior Pro enjoys long walks in the rain. The Pallin Catalyst can happily be taken home to meet your mother.

over it? Will you be wearing extra layers for warmth under your soft-shell jacket? If so, what's the maximum amount of insulation you'll be able to wear comfortably? The thickness of the insulation or fleece layer will be a key feature to consider. The type and thickness of the fleece will give you an indication not only of how warm the jacket will be, but also of how well it will breathe. The more aerobic the activity you intend to undertake, the lighter the fleece layer should be and the more breathable the jacket.

## Conclusion

Most of the time when we're in the outdoors, the breathability and comfort of a garment are more important than whether it is 100 per cent waterproof. If you're tired of peeling layers off ten minutes after you set out and piling them back on whenever you stop for a break, then you're ready for a windproof fleece or a soft-shell jacket, which offers better breathability than a waterproof hard-shell and more protection than a fleece. 🍌

## Other brands available

| Brand         | Distributor      | Contact        |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Cloudveil     | Paddy Pallin     | (02) 8799 2400 |
| Earth Sea Sky | Earth Sea Sky    | +64 3 339 0126 |
| Gondwana      | Gondwana         | (03) 9371 3333 |
| Marmot        | LA Imports       | (02) 9913 7155 |
| Rab           | Bogong Equipment | (03) 9600 0599 |

Alister McGhie is unlikely to make the Australian team for the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. Regardless, he plans to continue his training regime in the NSW's Snowy Mountains which consists of walking, fly-fishing, backcountry skiing and rehydrating at the Snow Goose Hotel just in case.

The survey was refereed by Jim Graham.

# It's a marvelous night for a moondance...

The Moondance 1 and 2 are the latest additions to Mont's specialist lightweight tent range. Impressively light, they feature the latest in high tech materials, sturdy tub floors and the sort of attention to detail Mont is renowned for. Mont tents are durable, comfortable, easy to pitch and are built from the ground up to perform in the Australian wilderness.

## Moondance 1

At just 1.6kg, the Moondance 1 is the ultimate fast and light minimalist tent. It features a robust floor and good ventilation and is sure to become a favourite with the solo walker, adventure racer or cycle tourist.

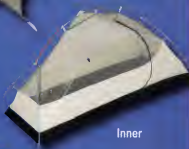
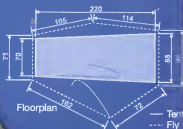
### Specifications:

|                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Capacity         | 1 Person           |
| Packed Weight    | 1.59 kg            |
| Minimum Weight   | 1.47 kg            |
| Footprint Weight | 170 g              |
| Floor Area       | 1.74m <sup>2</sup> |

\* Minimum weight includes inner, fly, poles and 2 x pegs only.



Inner + Fly



Inner

## Moondance 2

This 2-person ultra-light tent is an excellent choice if weight and bulk are your primary considerations. At just under 2 kg's it's the perfect tent for adventure racing teams and lightweight dreams, it's a marvellous night for a Moondance.

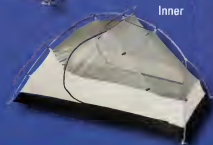
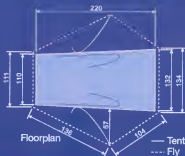
### Specifications:

|                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Capacity         | 2 Person           |
| Packed Weight    | 1.98 kg            |
| Minimum Weight   | 1.86 kg            |
| Footprint Weight | 186g               |
| Floor Area       | 2.66m <sup>2</sup> |

\* Minimum weight includes inner, fly, poles and 2 x pegs only.



Inner + Fly



Inner



## Mont Adventure Equipment

An Australian Company

[www.mont.com.au](http://www.mont.com.au)

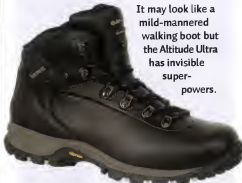
# Not exactly what Dumas meant

## The boot in the Ion Mask

**Ion Mask** is an amazing-sounding system. A boot is placed in a magic vacuum chamber along with a top-secret chemical. Plasma-filled coils are electrified, vaporising the chemical, which then bonds permanently to, and within, every fibre of the boot. The end result is a hydrophobic boot—usually waterproof and dirt-shedding, with breathability unaffected. The system requires that fabrics have certain mechanical properties in order to make them properly waterproof. Water will eventually get through an Ion Mask treated T-shirt, for example, because of its open weave. The process uses very little energy, and only as much of the chemical as can be bonded to the garment, so there is no material waste.

**Hi-Tec** is the first company to take advantage of this technology with its **Altitude Ultra 10 walking boots**. The Altitude Ultra 10 is a full-grain leather boot with a Vibram sole and a recycled PET shank, which retails for \$280. It is waterproof while being lighter and more breathable than comparable shoes featuring waterproof-breathable membranes. Contact **Skype Group** on (02) 9502 6200 for more information.

It may look like a mild-mannered walking boot but the Altitude Ultra has invisible super-powers.



## Hide and seek game is over

With the adoption of the world-standard 406 MHz frequency for **EPIRB** devices, the decommissioning in February 2009 of the 121 MHz frequency sounded like a great idea. With little more than six months to go, however, it was alarming that very few appropriately sized 406 MHz units were available in Australia (due to the heavier battery usage of these units). The **Kannad 406 XS-3** has helped to tip the scales. The 406 MHz units transmit a digital signal, meaning they can be detected sooner and located much more accurately. They also transmit the unit's identity, presumably so rescuers can check you out on Facebook first to figure out if you're single and good-looking. The XS-3 weighs 295 grams, is waterproof to ten metres, floats, incorporates a GPS beacon for greatly increased accuracy (location to within 60 metres), and retails for \$700. With a stand-by battery life of six

years and a 24-hour transmitting life, the XS-3 is helping to make 406 MHz a possibility.

Contact **Next Destination** on (08) 9444 0233 for more information.

## Babushka pots

Packing pots, plates and food is often a drama at the breaking of camp. After studying babushka dolls, those clever boffins at **GSi** have crafted the **nFORM gourmet system**. Plates, pots, Tupperware-style containers, strainers, lids and frying pans fit together elegantly. There has also been some crafty use made of materials: the stuff sack doubles as a basin; the bronze-col-



It's hard to believe but all of these fit together.

oured Teflon coating heats fast and evenly; Lexan parts such as the lid (with built-in strainer) are very strong for their weight. It is possible to buy sets or to build your own from individual items, which also means you can replace bits that get lost or broken. Distributed by **Spelean**, the two-person **Backpacking Set** retails for \$139. Contact **Spelean** on 1800 634 853 to find out more.

## Sleeping with a comfortable conscience

Once upon a time only softies used foam mats. A wet newspaper was pure luxury. When closed-cell foams became the norm, inflatable foam mats soon came along to seduce the weak-spirited, until every man and his dog had an **inflatable mat**.

Now **Pacific Outdoor Equipment** has done everyone a favour and produced a carbon-neutral inflatable sleeping mat. Loft and insulation are provided by bamboo rather than foam or leathers, fabrics are undyed, valves are made from recycled aluminium, and the manufacturing is done using solar- and wind-produced electricity. The mats are rated for three sea-



Sleep easy on the Eco Thermal 6.

sons, the **Eco Thermo 6** (709 grams) retails for \$200, and \$190 for the **Women's Edition** (650 grams). Contact **Sea to Summit** on (08) 9221 6617 for more information.

A very nice companion to the Eco mat, **Marmot's Eco Pro synthetic sleeping bags** feature predominantly recycled materials (even the zips!). The Eco Pro series, along with the rest of Marmot's Upcycle range, features salvaged and recycled materials—the way it should be. The Eco Pro 30 is a three-season mummy-shaped bag, weighing 1.3 kilograms and retailing for \$250. Contact **LA Imports** on (02) 9913 7155 for more information.

## A lighter follow-up

**Mont's** return last year to the tent-making game gave us the Krypton. The follow-up model, the sub-two kilogram **Moondance II**, is well within the lightweight category. It is a three-season, two-person tent, with a separate vestibule and entrance for each occupant. The **Moondance I**



The Moondance II is perfect for lightweight couples.

is for those who go it alone. The Moondance II retails for \$530 and the Moondance I for \$429. Contact **Mont** on (02) 6162 0900 to find out more.

## Knick-Knacks

### Keep the mossies away

Being woken by mosquitoes, and the smell of using sleeping bags, are two deep memories from time in the bush. Equip seeks to end this with its range of Healthguard antibacterial and insect-repellent-treated sleeping bags and liners. The range currently includes a 550 loft down sleeping bag, a synthetic sleeping bag, and silk or cotton liners, priced at \$199.95, \$99.95, \$79.95 and \$29.95, respectively. Contact Equip for further details on (08) 9331 6033.

## Copping a snoot

A problem with camera bags and bushwalking is getting to your equipment at a moment's notice. The **Lowepro Inverse 100 AW** (RRP \$100) and **200 AW** (RRP \$120) belt packs could be your answer. Designed to be worn as either a bum bag or shoulder-bag, they work like a wide snoot-



The nFORM Gourmet line represents a unique solution of ingenious tableware and cookware items designed to eliminate the guesswork of packing for the outdoors. A la carte or in preconfigured sets, nFORM Gourmet is redefining outdoor function.



#### CAMPING COOK SYSTEM

NEW

BUGABOO

LEXAN

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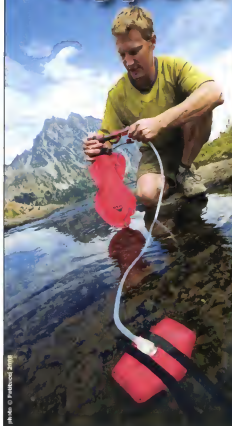


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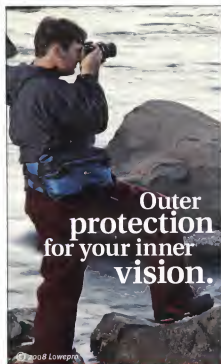
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## From the Billy

### Risi e Bisi

Relax. Enjoy time spent cooking

**Feeds:** two for dinner

**Cooking time:** 45 minutes

**Energy density:** 6.9–10.0 kJ/g, 5.4–8.5 kJ/ml

A staple of the lightweight gourmet, risotto  
can provide a solid base for a simple meal  
or be a feature dish in its own right. Risi e  
Bisi is a classic sweet variant using the ever-  
popular dehydrated peas.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 cup arborio rice
- 2 chicken stock cubes
- 1 small onion
- 35 g dehydrated peas
- 700 ml water

#### Optional:

- 3 tbsp butter/oil
- 1/2 cup mushrooms
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1 tbsp parmesan cheese

Cut the onion into small pieces and sweat  
over a low heat in the butter/oil until trans-  
lucent, then add the rice and bring up the  
heat, stirring constantly. Once the rice is  
uniformly coated, add the wine and water,  
crumbling the stock cubes into the liquid.  
Place the lid on the pot and bring to the  
boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer and  
continue cooking for 10 minutes, stirring  
periodically to prevent the meal burning or  
sticking to the pot. Add the peas and sliced  
mushrooms and continue to cook, adding  
further water as required until the rice is  
soft all the way through but no liquid is set-  
tling at the bottom. Finally, season with  
parmesan cheese.

Any of the optional ingredients can be left  
out of the meal. The wine can be replaced  
by additional water and the onions can be  
sweated without butter/oil. If you can find  
one, a non-stick pot makes the cooking  
significantly easier by reducing the stirring  
required. Any way you do it, however, this  
is a meal that takes time, hopefully while  
you enjoy the panorama from your wilder-  
ness kitchen.

John Pillans

Wild is accepting recipes for From the Billy. We welcome  
readers' contributions to this section; payment is at  
our standard rate. Please keep them to 300 words or  
less. Send them to [editorialadmin@wild.com.au](mailto:editorialadmin@wild.com.au).

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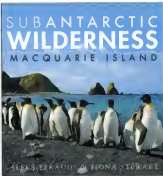
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## Tales From the Bush

BY QUENTIN CHESTER (AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC, 2008, \$24.95, [www.australiantalesfromthebush.com.au](http://www.australiantalesfromthebush.com.au))

This affectionate collection of bush-inspired jottings, memories and theories is drawn from a lifetime of adventures by one of Australia's best-known outdoors writers. From rainforests and beaches to waterless rock gullies, Chester's well-crafted yarns amble along at the pleasant pace of a relaxing bushwalk, exposing a world view shaped by a life in the outdoors.

Loyal Wild readers will know these tales well—most of them were given life between the pages of previous issues. If you're looking for new material, you'll be disappointed. Chester's stories aren't ground-breaking, but there is good reason why his words have graced so many of Wild's pages. His tales of the wild are infused with a love of the solitude, space and spirituality he finds there; whether analysing the impact of the camera on the bushwalking experience or celebrating a hard-earned summit view, Chester's ponderings are sure to strike a chord with anyone who harbours a love for wandering Australia's open spaces.

Bron Willis

## Thirsty Country

BY ASA WAHLQUIST (ALLEN & UNWIN, 2008, \$27.95, [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com))

There are few matters of more pressing concern to Australia than how water is collected, stored and used. In *Thirsty Country: Options for Australia*, Asa Wahlquist, longtime rural writer at the *Australian*, provides a timely survey of how we have arrived at our current precarious position and what our options are for the future. The extensive research that has gone into this book and the lucid manner in which relevant facts, figures and arguments are presented and analysed make for a valuable and easily digested overview for all stakeholders—which, in various ways, we all are.

Tony Cox

## 150 Walks in Victoria

BY TYRONE THOMAS AND ANDREW CLOSE (EXPLORE AUSTRALIA, 2007, \$34.95, [www.hardiegrant.com.au](http://www.hardiegrant.com.au))

This is a major update to the many editions of Tyrone Thomas's 120 Walks in Victoria, with 76 new walks, and a larger size and colour printing throughout. There is a good variety of walks with plenty to suit everyone—no matter what their level of fitness or experience. Track notes seem

accurate and easy to follow. Maps are large and clear, and use colour to good effect. The book is a great resource for anyone who loves bushwalking in Victoria, and has already given me some fresh ideas.

Daniel Gottlieb

## Bushwalking in the Rainbow Region

BY MICHAEL SMITH (MICHAEL SMITH, 2008, \$8, [www.geocities.com/nimbinbushwalkers/rainbowbushwalks.htm](http://www.geocities.com/nimbinbushwalkers/rainbowbushwalks.htm))

This is a comprehensive collection of 59 walks in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales. It seems to be aimed at the casual bushwalker and would be a great resource for visitors to the area.

The book has good photos and easy-to-read maps and directions, but the maps lack topographic detail. Another useful inclusion would have been a profile of each walk to give an indication of the climbing involved.

Gary Tischer

## Tasmania's Wilderness Battles

BY GREG BUCKMAN (JACANA BOOKS, 2008, \$27.95, [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com))

Given the monumental task of saving Tasmania's wilderness from the loggers, miners, dammers and all the rest, *Tasmania's Wilderness Battles: A History* has a surprisingly light touch. It does not hold back, however, from exposing the amazing entanglements of internal conflict. The Tasmanian community and its small, heroic environment movement are torn between resource exploitation and wilderness preservation.

Such a tiny island, and so much beautiful wilderness at risk from a narrowly based economy all too bent upon resource exploitation. If you have a wilderness-preserving bone in your body, by the end of this book you will feel highly motivated to join the struggle.

Keith Muir

## The River Runs Free

BY GEOFF LAW (VIKING, 2008, \$32.95, [www.penguin.com.au](http://www.penguin.com.au))

This book is a passionate, honest account of Law's involvement with the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, his many wild adventures, and the courageous campaign to save the Franklin River.

A powerful epilogue reminds the reader that the destruction of wilderness continues, and that governments cling to the flawed economic pro-

posals of ethically challenged industries. Law calls for a wider perspective—it's not just about saving a river, but about valuing and respecting healthy and wild ecosystems which cannot be measured in economic terms. For anyone with a heart, it's well worth a read.

Kim Tyson

## Subantarctic Wilderness


BY ALEKS TERAUDS AND FIONA STEWART (JACANA BOOKS, 2008, \$59.95, [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com))

Macquarie Island is a haven in the fierce Southern Ocean for abundant wildlife and flora. A World Heritage reserve, primarily listed for its geology of exposed oceanic crust, Macquarie Island is dominated by megaherbs, mosses, lichens, grasses and millions of penguins, seals, albatross and other sea birds. The author's photographs, accompanied by the artwork of Fiona Stewart, take the reader on an exceptional journey to this little-visited speck in the sub-Antarctic, from its discovery in 1810 and exploitation of its seals and penguins for oil, to the beginning of the modern scientific era with Douglas Mawson's expedition of 1911–14, through to the continuing presence of Australian Antarctic Division and Tasmanian National Parks & Wildlife Service expeditioners. This magnificent book will delight with its insight into one of the world's most remote places.

Brett Free

## Backcountry Skiing

BY MARTIN VOLKEN, SCOTT SCHELL AND MARGARET WHEELER (THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, 2007, \$34.95, [www.mountaineersbooks.org](http://www.mountaineersbooks.org))

*Backcountry Skiing: Skills for Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering* won't teach you how to ski. Rather, it gets on with teaching the additional skills and awareness necessary to travel past the resort boundaries safely. The book covers a very broad range of topics, from equipment selection, applicable mountaineering techniques and avalanche and weather awareness to nutrition, training and more. It is encouraging to see the authors place strong emphasis on situational awareness and making sound judgements. While the book does have a North American focus, its teachings are certainly appropriate for our slopes. This is a valuable guide and resource. 

Mathew Farrell

Publications for possible review are welcome. Send them, with RRP and a digital image of the cover for reproduction, to Wild, PO Box 415, Prahran, VIC 3181.

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**Sally Goulet enjoying some fine conditions on the Overland Track, Cradle Mt–Lake St Clair National Park, Tasmania. Steven Nowakowski**

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